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THE FIGHT FOR RETIREMENT SECURITY
The Editors

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OFFENDED?

WHY CARTOONS GET UNDER OUR SKIN

by RICHARD GOLDSTEIN

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LETTERS

R. O. BLECHMAN

ISRAELI PEACENIKS

New York City

■ In her otherwise fine essay "The Country Doctor" [Jan. 24], Amy Wilentz makes this basic observation, as if it's surprising or shocking: "Scratch an Israeli peacenik, in other words, and you will very often find a Zionist; blow up a bus or a discotheque or a pizza parlor filled with Israelis, and you will find that every single Israeli is, to some degree, a Zionist."

She's referred to Amos Oz's consistent analysis of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a conflict of rights, yet seems not to understand it. Most Israeli peaceniks, just like most Israelis, are "Zionists." They know that Israel was established to be, and still largely serves as, a refuge for a small, often victimized people. They believe in a Jewish state—one that is culturally, but not theologically, Jewish and respects minority rights—alongside a Palestinian-Arab state, as a pragmatic accommodation for the two warring peoples. This is a progressive Zionist position. Why juxtapose "peacenik" and "Zionist" as if they are opposites? RALPH SELIGER, *editor*
Israeli Horizons, *Meretz USA*

WILENTZ REPLIES

Los Angeles

■ Ralph Seliger assumes that everyone in the world understands that an Israeli peacenik is also almost indubitably a Zionist. While most Jews and certainly all Israelis know this—in fact, it's virtually reflexive, almost axiomatic—not all Americans or Europeans know it. Some, indeed, conflate "peacenik" (even *Israeli* peacenik) with "leftist," and "leftist" with "anti-Zionist"—a flaw in international understanding that Amos Oz often uses his position to correct. I too was hoping to counter this ill-informed perception.
AMY WILENTZ

THE COURT HISTORIAN

Charlottetown, PEI, Canada

■ Well, at 96 and 87 respectively, as Eric Alterman puts it ["The Liberal Media," Dec. 27], John Kenneth Galbraith and Arthur Schlesinger Jr. deserve respect. It was around 1950 that I became upset when Carey McWilliams wrote in *The Nation* that Arthur spoke the language of McCarthy with a Harvard accent. Fond of McWilliams and a family friend of the Schlesingers, I wrote McWilliams a sharp rebuke, and terminated (victim of my own terror of contamination) my budding relationship with *The Nation*. McWilliams was a mild giant, a fine editor at a time of tribulation, what with the Red Scare and accusations that a staff member, Del Vayo, an exiled Spanish Republican, was a Communist. The *Nation* offices, then way downtown on Vesey Street, felt beleaguered.

What ticked off McWilliams was the beginnings of the Americans for Democratic Action (ADA), conceived by Schlesinger and others as a way to maintain center-left New Deal influence by purging Reds from progressive ranks. A bad time, described by Victor Navasky in his book *Naming Names*. I recall American Veterans Committee meetings extending to 2 AM with wrangling among factions over "points of order"and "points of information." Was I right in siding with Schlesinger against McWilliams? I doubt it. Even Schlesinger and Galbraith made mistakes, as Alterman notes. ADA, some labor unions and others curtailed the Bill of Rights and human rights in order to save them (as did President Truman with his loyalty program). This can be perceived as a Leszek Kolakowski dilemma, in which a principle is threatened with self-destruction from excess consistency; or as cowardice, or outflanking the opposition.

In mulling all this over, it occurs to me that the present is not unlike the period following World War II. I now doubt that the Red Scare made any more sense than the present "war on terrorism." In both instances, 1945 and the end of the twentieth century, the United States, in a position of unrivaled power, became frightened of insignificant enemies, leading to a displacement of resources that favored the military-industrial-intelligence-university complex; and invasions of constitutional rights. Yes, I am nostalgic for the vigorous, disorderly dialogue of the 1930s, Reds included, when we rallied around real issues like the right to organize. The recent Kerry campaign may well be the unhappy legacy of the ADA and like-minded failings of conscience and virtue. JAMES MUNVES

New York City

■ I have no quarrel with Eric Alterman's critique of Peter Beinart's call for a new cold war ["The Liberal Media," Jan. 10/17], although his discussion of the need for a Democratic fighting faith takes pretty much the same stance as Beinart but from a liberal cold war perspective. This perspective also surfaced in his previous column [Dec. 27], where Alterman's appreciation of the tough-minded realism of Arthur Schlesinger is overly selective.

Schlesinger was for the most part critical of US policy only when the Democrats were out of power. Much of his well-written history is pure hagiography. In 1950 he was an early supporter of intervention in Southeast Asia. He called for support of the French puppet Bao Dai, and he was certain "American reform would accompany military funds" and "American technical missions [could] easily be organized to combat the social problems." Is this nonideological, tough-minded realism?

During the McCarthy era, when some professors refused to answer investigating committees' questions, Schlesinger, defending academic freedom while denouncing its practitioners, supported the right to "loathsome ideas" and referred to the professors as "contemptible individuals" and "wretched nonentities" who had lived "a political lie" in the service of a "foreign nation and of a totalitarian conspiracy."

When *Nation* editor Carey McWilliams, *Yale Law Review* editor Thomas Emerson and poet Stringfellow Barr called for a conference on the attack on civil liberties, Schlesinger called them "Typhoid Marys of the left bearing the germs of infection, even if not suffering obviously from the diseases." Such "comrades of the pro-Communist left" had no credibility to call for such a conference. (McWilliams responded that Schlesinger "spoke the language of McCarthyism with a Harvard accent.") Schlesinger also called Victor Navasky's *Naming Names* a "tricky," "disingenuous" apology for Stalinism. As the Hollywood Ten were appealing their convictions for refusing to answer investigators' questions, Schlesinger wrote that Dalton Trumbo, John Howard Lawson and Alvah Bessie had "refused to own up to their political beliefs before a Committee of Congress."

Alterman waxes eloquent about the Milan Conference sponsored by the Committee for Cultural Freedom, funded by the CIA. Dwight Macdonald reviewed the conference for *Encounter*, also funded by the CIA, and saw it as a boring defense of Western anti-Communism. The editors demanded drastic revisions and ultimately superseded his piece with one by the Dickensian-named Edward Shills praising the conference. Both Schlesinger and Shills defended the covert CIA support. This was indeed a part of their "fighting faith."

In Alterman's romanticization of the period he writes as if he is unaware of the darker side of this cold war history, when the threat to civil liberties was constant and the liberal opposition a frail reed. This may simply be due to the current historical amnesia. Or, it may be a matter of generational historical ignorance. In either case it is a distorted picture. MICHAEL WRESZIN

ALTERMAN REPLIES

New York City

■ I thank James Munves for his reminiscences. Michael Wreszin's letter is profoundly confused. He accuses me of being "overly selective" in my "appreciation of the tough-minded realism of Arthur Schlesinger" and then goes on to lay out a series of events in which he has differences

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EDITORIALS

Retirement Security Fight

Call out the fifes, sound the bugles, strike on the drums. With the State of the Union behind us, the Battle for Social Security now officially begins—again. The President's cynical distortions are fully engaged—"crisis" and "bankruptcy" having replaced "weapons of mass destruction" in his fearmongering rhetoric. The right-wing propaganda machine assumes relentless repetition of the big lies will carry the day this time. But we doubt it. Those of us who understand the true condition of Social Security—and why Republicans wish to dismantle this essential and durable system of social insurance—are fairly confident that truth can prevail. It helps that a coalition of progressive groups are making Social Security their top priority and that most major news organizations (the same ones Bush snookered on Iraq) have belatedly discovered the President's factual manipulations on Social Security (it would be disrespectful to call them lies). In any case, until this fight is won, no one can back away.

Bush's cruelest distortion lies in forcing the political system to confront the wrong problem. The crisis is not Social Security. It is retirement security in general—Medicare most obviously, but also the medley of employee pension plans shrinking in value and the collapsed private savings of American households. All three are far more imperiled than Social Security, with its relatively minor and distant problems. All three will require densely complicated policy solutions and deep shifts in economic thinking.

Social Security, it is important to remember, is the bedrock guarantee that keeps millions of elderly people from destitution in their old age—the basic floor people can build on, not a ticket to golden-age affluence. Social Security is the *only* income for one-fifth of retirees, and it is the principal source of income for two out of three retired Americans. When the other pillars of retirement security are weakening, it is especially irresponsible to tamper with it.

Democrats, or progressives at large if Democrats lack the nerve, should force a public debate to address all the elements of retirement security and should begin advocating solutions. Indeed, this is an opportunity for inventive social thinking that might restore the Democrats' faded reputation as the party of reform. Defending sound, long-established government programs is honorable work, but Democrats must go on the offense with their own perceptions of social and economic vulnerabilities and their own visionary solutions.

Any discussion of the crisis appropriately starts with medical care. Medicare and its less popular stepsister, Medicaid, for the poor, both face impending financial shortfalls, driven mainly by relentless healthcare inflation. A rational analysis would observe that the two important aspects of healthcare financing—for the poor and the elderly—are now managed by government. It's time to take a deep breath and advocate a universal healthcare system that can confront the rising costs and wasted resources embedded in the entire system. The insurance industry was given its chance to do this in the 1990s and failed utterly, despite its intrusive regulation of doctors and patients. Symbolic half-measures by government will fail too. Americans at large are ready for real answers.

The pension crisis is more complex and also calls for big ideas. The deteriorating condition of corporate pensions is an almost daily political scandal—though usually reported only in the business pages—as companies dump retirees and workers. Unions have typically traded wage increases for better retirement benefits in contract bargaining, but when companies renege on the deal, the federal government is stuck with the tab—an ominously expanding list of bailouts.

The supposed replacement for defined-benefit plans—the matched employee-company contributions to 401(k) accounts—looks increasingly like a busted promise, too. The 401(k) approach

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sounded great during the fantastic run-up of stock prices in the 1980s and '90s, but that fantasy is over—and ended badly for small investors. Many baby boomers are discovering their battered 401(k) portfolios won't support retirement.

Meanwhile, Americans' private savings rate—the money they sock away themselves—has been hovering around zero. (Half the population, remember, has no pension plan other than Social Security plus whatever they can save personally.) The explanation for the decline in household savings is not a mystery. A generation of wage stagnation and the growing inequality of incomes and wealth allows some folks to live very, very well and save fabulously, too. But farther down the income ladder millions of families are working extra jobs just to keep up with the mortgage and credit-card payments, trying to forestall further decline in their standard of living. This shortfall is the most ominous of all, since it is so widespread in the middle class, not to mention the working poor.

The solution is nothing less than an epochal shift in economic policy, including its approach to globalization, to refocus attention on work and wages as the priority. Telling people they should save more is pointless as long as the economic system continues to tamp down income levels across the broad middle. The portents of deindustrialization and growing international indebtedness suggest grim consequences ahead won't be confined to the elderly.

Restoring a stable system of retirement security (assuming Social Security survives the Republican assault) is a gigantic challenge that requires a much stronger role for the federal government. Washington is already a central player as last-resort insurer and major financier because of the federal tax deductions companies get for their pension contributions. These contributions represent a major public subsidy to private enterprise, yet corporations are allowed to game the pension funds to benefit their own bottom line while employees have no voice whatever in how the funds are invested. These and other contradictions in the thirty-year-old basic pension law must be changed.

But that's only a first step. We can further envision, for example, government creating a second-tier pension plan, above Social Security, that insures a safe, conservative vehicle for retirement savings, free of the scandalous corporate finagling and phony accounting. This government-supervised pension would be available to anyone but tailored especially for workers struggling to save (a very broad group in today's circumstances) and for millions of smaller firms that have difficulty bearing pension costs. The financing would be a blend of tax deductions, employee savings and employer contributions, perhaps including bonds or marketable stock options that constitute hard capital rather than unreliable promises. In a very wealthy nation, this problem is solvable with a little imagination if only serious politicians will ignore the heavy hand of corporations intruding on the public's business.

Meantime, Social Security does need some fixes eventually. But these can occur anytime in the next twenty or thirty years—whenever the political community gets up the nerve to raise taxes on the high end of the income ladder. By substantially raising the cap that now restricts FICA taxes to the first $90,000 of a worker's income, the big winners in today's economy would no longer be exempt from sharing the burden fairly—and any potential future shortfall would be easily forestalled.

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EDITORIALS

Defending Social Security successfully will deliver a profound blow to the Bush Administration's "You're on your own, Jack" ideology—thinly disguised as the "ownership society." Bush does not speak to America's deepest values. Despite the right's market ideology, Americans still believe in the importance of sharing risks to achieve common purposes, described more simply as looking out for one another. Social Security is that practical ideal. We do not think Americans are ready to give up on it.

Hope and Reality in Iraq

The determination and hopefulness of Iraqis on election day were captured in many dispatches, none better than in one by British journalist Robert Fisk. "Even as the explosions thundered over Baghdad," he wrote, "the people came in their hundreds and then in their thousands. Entire families, crippled old men supported by their sons, children beside them, babies in the arms of their mothers.... Just after voting started, there were 30 detonations in the city in less than two minutes—but still they came as if on a family day out."

However large the turnout may have been (and immediately, especially in the European press, questions were raised about initial rosy estimates) the fact that so many Iraqis risked the dangers they did says something profound about most people's desire to decide for themselves how they are to be governed. As one man told Fisk, "We only had military coups and revolutions before. We voted 'yes' or 'yes.' Now we vote for ourselves."

Yet it would be a mistake to assume that the elections mark a major change in Iraq's fortunes. For one thing, the participation of Sunnis, who make up about 20 percent of the population, was extremely low, causing the leading Sunni clerics to declare that the election "lacks legitimacy." This suggests major problems ahead as those chosen in the election begin the process of negotiation and compromise necessary to create a viable state. Adding to the problems of the new officials, their authority will be compromised as long as masses of Americans remain ensconced in Baghdad's Green Zone like the colonial powers of old.

Moreover, as long as the US occupation continues, the insurgency is likely to continue—possibly even to grow. The Bush Administration interpreted the turnout as a vindication of its policies. But it's important to recall that this past June, after we were told that the transfer of sovereignty would lead to progress on the ground, the situation only got worse. (It's also worth noting that if it had been up to the Bush Administration, there never would have been an election; US proconsul Paul Bremer wanted to set up what would have been essentially a puppet regime, and it was only after dire threats from Shiite cleric Ali al-Sistani that the White House grudgingly agreed to allow elections to take place.) One article making the rounds of the web in the days after the election was a *New York Times* dispatch from 1967 reporting that "United States officials were surprised and heartened today at the size of the turnout in South Vietnam's presidential election despite a Vietcong terrorist campaign to disrupt the voting. According to reports from Saigon, 83 percent of the 5.85 million registered voters cast their ballots." The dispatch added that although the winners were US-backed generals it "does not, in the Administration's view, diminish the significance of the constitutional step that has been taken."

Even with no party on the ballot campaigning unambiguously for the Americans' departure, many Iraqis, despite their fears about safety, made it clear that they viewed the election as one way to accelerate a US withdrawal. This includes Shiites, who will dominate the new government by their numbers after suffering years of oppression under Saddam Hussein. It seems doubtful, however, that Iraqi officials who have worked closely with the US occupiers will heed their wishes; two days after the election, Iraq's president said it would be "complete nonsense" to ask foreign troops to leave now.

At each step of the way in Iraq—from the initial invasion, to the disbanding of the Iraqi Army, to the botched and corrupt reconstruction process, to the hastily called election—the Bush Administration has made the situation worse. If anything, the continued US presence may inhibit Sunni moderates from joining the constitution-writing process. But despite all the difficulties and flawed voting, the newly elected Iraqi officials may be able to create a viable government. They need all the international support and encouragement they can get in the months ahead, but that ought to come from a renewed UN effort in which the US role is confined to providing funds for rebuilding. The Iraqis should be making plans for what to do after regaining their sovereignty; the Americans should be making plans to go home.

COMMENT

FCC: It Could Get Worse

On the long list of resignations of Cabinet members, agency heads and political appointees that has accompanied the launch of the second Bush term, no member of the Administration's team left under quite so dark a cloud as Michael Powell. The decision of the chair of the Federal Communications Commission to step down was met with near-universal sighs of relief—from the citizen activists and members of Congress who had battled his ham-handed efforts to allow Big Media to get even bigger, of course; but also from industry insiders who had come to see the hapless Powell as an inept champion. It was a measure of how thoroughly Powell had botched his primary mission—eliminating barriers to media consolidation and monopoly—that within days of the announcement of his impending departure, the Justice Department decided not to appeal the US Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit's ruling that struck down FCC rule changes that would have unleashed a new wave of conglomeration at the local and national levels.

But don't think that Powell's exit and the Justice Department's backing off mean the fight is done. As Representative Maurice Hinchey, the New York Democrat who was in the forefront of the fight against Powell's rule changes, notes, a bad turn has been avoided, but "we still have a long way to go toward achieving honest and balanced reporting" and toward the development of regulatory structures that "provide greater rights to smaller

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COMMENT

media outlets who too often are silenced by the media giants." Those giants haven't given up on their battle for bigness. And it appears that the Bush Administration is preparing to bring in new, potentially even more industry-friendly troops. With Powell leaving, there will be a reshuffling of the three-member Republican faction that now dominates the FCC. (Democratic commissioners Michael Copps and Jonathan Adelstein, both critics of rule changes that would have allowed one company to own a newspaper, television and radio stations and other media in the same market, and that would have dramatically eased controls on the growth of national networks, will remain. But they will also continue to be on the weak end of a 3-to-2 partisan divide.)

Bush will definitely have an opportunity to appoint a new chair, and if, as some predict, former wireless industry lobbyist Kathleen Abernathy also leaves, he could radically reshape the commission. One prospective replacement for Powell is the third Republican appointee on the commission, Kevin Martin. But Martin upset industry insiders when he sided with Democrats Copps and Adelstein to block Powell's attempt to choke off local phone competition—former House Commerce Committee chair Billy Tauzin dismissed Martin as a "renegade Republican" after that vote. And the insiders want to be sure the agency is chaired by someone who is 100 percent in favor of their agenda.

That's created something of a bandwagon for the appointment of Becky Klein—a former head of the Texas Public Utility Commission—with whom the industry has already developed a cozy relationship. When Klein challenged Texas Congressman Lloyd Doggett last year, the *Austin Chronicle* described her as "a horrible candidate" who appeared to be less serious about winning a House seat than "auditioning for her next GOP patronage job." Despite that fact, Klein collected more than $800,000 in campaign contributions, with a substantial portion coming from telecommunications and energy companies—more, in fact, from those industries than any other first-time GOP candidate in the country. Klein earned just 31 percent of the vote, but as Gene Kimmelman, a senior director of Consumers Union, explained, "Clearly, the companies are investing in the future."

There is no way that Bush is going to put a champion of the public interest in charge of the FCC. But members of the Senate, which must confirm his nominee, should signal now that Klein is simply unacceptable. It would be an important show of independence by Congress, where there is growing bipartisan awareness of public disenchantment with one-size-fits-all media. Vermont Representative Bernie Sanders says, "It is time for Congress to become pro-active and to fight for legislation which will allow for more localism, more diversity of opinion and more competition in the media." Sanders is right. And what better first step than to say that the next FCC chair should come without strings attached?

JOHN NICHOLS AND ROBERT W. MCCHESNEY

John Nichols is The Nation*'s Washington correspondent. He and Robert W. McChesney, who teaches at the University of Illinois, founded Free Press, a media reform network (www.freepress.net).*

CALVIN TRILLIN

DEMOCRACY FLOWERS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

So now this election is done.
What will follow it—maybe a
Reversal so women can drive
Cars in Saudi Arabia?

Cartoon Wars

Once upon a time, a psychiatrist named Fredric Wertham went on a tear over Wonder Woman. He detected a vagina in the crook of her cartoon arm, and he thought her superpowers were giving girls "the wrong idea" about women's place in society. As for Batman's ward, Robin, his bare legs and devotion to his guardian were planting homosexual thoughts in boys, or so Wertham believed. His crusade led to Congressional hearings and the "voluntary" censorship of comics.

That was back in the freaked-out fifties; nothing so extreme has happened recently. But at an inaugural banquet last month, right-wing moralist James Dobson lectured members of Congress on the threat posed by SpongeBob SquarePants. Unlike some, he wasn't bothered by this deep-sea dweller holding hands with his buddy Patrick, a starfish. Nor was he troubled by the porous Mr. Pants appearing in a video promoting tolerance. Dobson's target was the "pledge of tolerance" one of the video's many sponsors had posted on its website. It dared to mention sexual identity among the categories that merit sensitivity. To Dobson, this was "homosexual propaganda" and another sign that cartoon characters are being "hijacked" to move the gay agenda.

It's an old obsession of the religious right. Remember Jerry Falwell's jihad against Tinky Winky, the purse-packing Teletubby? "He is purple—the gay-pride color; and his antenna is shaped like a triangle—the gay-pride symbol," Falwell fumed, adding that such "subtle depictions" of gay sexuality were being deliberately inserted into children's entertainment. Today's right-wing moralists are less bothered by subliminal messages than by the real issue of teaching children that homosexuals are worthy of respect. Dobson and his kind aren't really worried about cartoons turning kids queer. Their aim is to see that homophobia is free to operate, and one way to do that is to keep children from seeing gays as part of the human community.

During the Clinton years, these puritans were preaching mostly to the choir, but now the government too is listening. In late January, the new education secretary, Margaret Spellings, criticized the PBS show *Postcards From Buster* because its host, a gregarious bunny, had traveled to Vermont where he encountered, among other residents, a female couple. PBS decided not to distribute that episode (though local stations still may air it).

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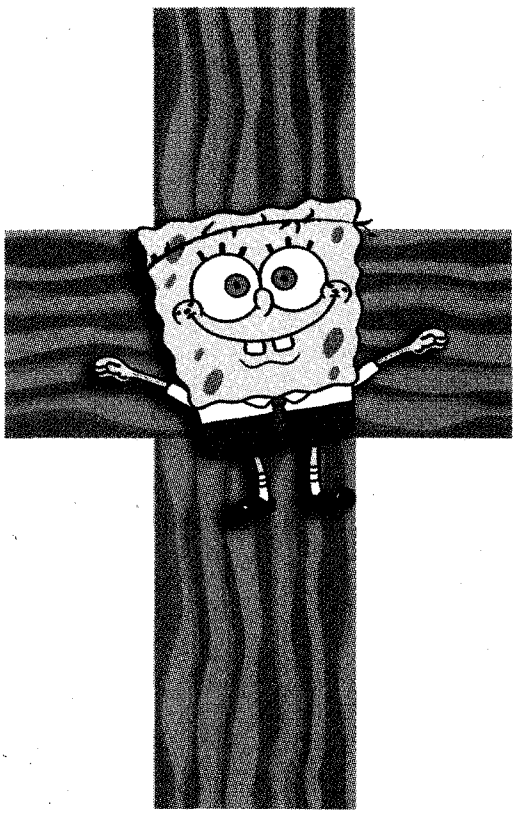
COMMENT

It's no surprise that kids' stuff looms so large in the culture war. No form of pop culture is more prone to blunt moralizing, whether it's the liberal ideal of inclusiveness in *Postcards From Buster* or the conservative critique of "political correctness" in the animated feature *The Incredibles*. But this struggle involves the medium as well as the message. Cartoons are powerful in a special way, and the less realistic they are the more potent they seem. Children are not the only ones deemed vulnerable to their impact. And you don't have to be a right-winger to see evil between the lines.

Consider the response to a recent Pat Oliphant editorial cartoon of Condoleezza Rice as a parrot perched on Bush's shoulder. "OK, Chief," she says. "Anything you say, Chief. You bet, Chief..." etc. When liberals gave Rice hell during her confirmation hearing, the right-wing snarlers of cable TV pounced on Oliphant's rendition. "I can't even begin to describe it," cried John Scarborough, "the racial stereotyping by a self-described liberal." The Christian Coalition chimed in, claiming to see a pattern of "left-wing prejudice." The agenda here is plain to see. Conservatives want to make it hard to go after a warmonger who happens to be black. And if they can pry African-Americans away from the liberal coalition, so much the better.



But some black commentators think Oliphant's cartoon does reflect a pattern of bias. *Washington Post* columnist Colbert King sees that parrot as big-lipped and buck-toothed. "It's hard to imagine a more demeaning and offensive caricature of a prospective secretary of state," he writes. To King, both this image of Rice as a flying factotum and the accusation that she is too loyal to her boss resonate with the stereotype of shuffling blacks. Is King being a bit, um, sensitive? Perhaps. But there's a long history of bigotry in editorial cartoons. The Irish once were regularly portrayed as monkeys, and Ariel Sharon has been drawn with a hooked nose in some European papers. Cartoons may make these negative attributes look funny, but the real purpose is to enforce a certain order through mockery. The fact that gay people can still be shown as limp-wristed pansies is a good indication of their uncertain status. That's why some gay readers were shocked to see a recent cartoon by Robert Grossman in these progressive pages. Playing off recent speculation that Abraham Lincoln was gay, Grossman drew him as a flaming trannie.

Take a step back from the particulars and you can sense the anxiety that animates the cartoon wars. Fundamentalists are convinced that pop culture is stealing the souls of their children. Gays are concerned that liberals will abandon them, especially after the talk from leading Democrats about how same-sex marriage lost John Kerry the election. Liberals are caught in a bind, as the same system that thwarts the collective advancement of African-Americans bestows considerable power on some of them. Do some progressives resent blacks who rise by embracing conservative values? Do they wish gay rights would go away? Maybe not consciously, but such negative sentiments must exist along with empathy—we wouldn't be human if they didn't. And editorial cartoonists can sniff the emotional wind. The best of them delve into the subconscious.

During the 1996 campaign, Bob Dole was often drawn with a withered arm, or shown as a patient on an operating table. This idea was unspeakable in polite society, but it probably played a part in Dole's defeat. Clinton was portrayed as a lubricious bozo with a bulbous phallic nose, while Bush is fitted with a tiny schnoz and giant ears, giving him a distinctly infantile aura. These images work by tapping into hidden feelings, and that is the mandate of editorial cartoonists. They are the *tummlers* of journalism. Of course, their revelations aren't always welcome. Nor are they necessarily wholesome. Sometimes they reveal the fear and loathing behind the smiley face.

My generation will never forget Herblock's vicious rendition of Richard Nixon as an unshaven demento, or David Levine's infamous image of Lyndon Johnson lifting his shirt to show off a surgical scar in the shape of Vietnam. These sketches stick in the mind not just because of their content but because of their formal qualities. They capture something that seems essential, something we have always felt and perhaps feared in ourselves. It wasn't just the sight of a Hasid kissing a West Indian woman on the cover of *The New Yorker* that caused such a furor in 1993. It was the power of this Art Spiegelman image as a cartoon.

The word once referred to a crude model of a more important work, and in a sense it still does. Cartoons have an unfinished look that leaves a lot of interpretive space. Their sparse details and antic distortions are surreal yet recognizable enough to hit the target, whether it's a powerful politician or a basic human type. And because cartoons are the stuff of childhood, they invite us to enter a regressive, dreamy state. Movies do something similar through lighting, framing and the subliminal flicker of film itself. Cartoons work a bit like movies even when they are standing still.

To those who say that sometimes a parrot is just a parrot, I offer this memory of a cartoon that delighted me as a child. It was an animated trip to Africa, replete with nurturing lions, chatty monkeys and bouncy pickaninnies. It ended with a map of Africa, drawn in black. "And so we bid farewell to the dark continent," the narrator intoned. Then a pair of huge white lips burst from the map, crooning "Bah-bye!" This image enchanted me then and embarrasses me now, but the fact that it remains embedded in my imagination says something about the enduring power of cartoons.

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COMMENT

With the rise of graphic novels, computer-generated games and other meta-cartoon forms, it's clear that this medium is central to the postmodern sensibility. The price of such authority is that no cartoonist can claim to be in it just for laffs. These unstable images are going to be the subject of intense examination and roiling debate. That can be hard on the creative process, but the good news is that you never know where the argument will lead. After Dobson's remarks, the United Church of Christ announced that it welcomes SpongeBob into its flock, along with Tinky Winky. The cartoon wars continue.

RICHARD GOLDSTEIN

Richard Goldstein writes about the connections among pop culture, politics and sexuality.

In Fact . . .

JUDGMENT DAY IN CHILE

■ Peter Kornbluh writes: Chileans and the international human rights community marked a historic day of justice on January 28 when Gen. Manuel Contreras, the former head of the Chilean secret police known as DINA, and four other high-ranking officers from the Pinochet regime were sentenced for human rights crimes and began serving lengthy prison terms. Contreras resisted arrest; he brandished a pistol before being subdued at his home and transported to the Tribunal of Justice in downtown Santiago. A large crowd of his victims gave Contreras a send-off "with a rain of eggs and fruit," according to press reports, to the Cordillera penitentiary, where he is scheduled to reside for the next twelve years. Joining Contreras are four of his deputies, who were also convicted for the disappearance of a young leftist named Miguel Angel Sandoval in 1975. In a separate case, Gen. Hugo Salas Wenzel, the chief of the Center for National Intelligence (DINA's successor), was sentenced along with two of his lieutenants for what is known as the "massacre at Corpus Christi"—in which twelve members of a militant group opposed to the Pinochet regime were ambushed and executed in 1987. Barring a successful appeal, General Salas will serve a life sentence.

SLAVERS' BANK

■ John S. Friedman writes: JPMorgan Chase is the first company to admit that its predecessor firms owned large numbers of slaves. The bank acknowledged that two antecedent banks—Citizens Bank and Canal Bank of Louisiana—had accepted about 13,000 slaves as loan collateral from 1831 to 1865 and took ownership of about 1,250 slaves when their owners defaulted on loans. In a letter last month to employees from chairman William Harrison Jr. and president James Dimon, JPMorgan Chase, which recently merged with Bank One, apologized to the African-American community and promised to provide $5 million to fund undergraduate scholarships for black students from Louisiana. *The Nation* broke the story connecting JPMorgan Chase and slavery in an article published more than four years ago [Friedman, "Chase's Historical Ledger," October 9, 2000]. In 2003 a Chicago City Council ordinance took effect requiring companies doing business with the city to disclose specific links to slavery. In March 2004 Alderman Dorothy Tillman, who had sponsored the ordinance, accused JPMorgan Chase of profiting from the slave trade and lying about it in a sworn affidavit. About a month later, threatened with the loss of city business, JPMorgan Chase hired History Associates to examine past records. Deadria Farmer-Paellmann, adjunct professor of law at Southern New England School of Law, who did the original research alleging JPMorgan Chase's ties to slavery and who has spearheaded the drive for reparations from corporations, praised the company's action as "a good start." But she added that litigation against firms that had apparent financial links to slavery will continue and singled out Fleet Bank, now owned by Bank of America. The bank has denied the alleged connections.

THE DOCUMENTARY THEY WON'T SHOW

■ *Los Angeles Times* columnist Robert Scheer recently extolled a BBC film by Adam Curtis titled *The Power of Nightmares: The Rise of the Politics of Fear*. The three-hour documentary argues that the threat of international terrorism "is a fantasy that has been exaggerated and distorted by politicians"—mainly Administration neocons seeking to consolidate their power. The documentary does not deny that there are radical Islamic terrorist groups; but Curtis told Katrina vanden Heuvel that "the terrifying image of Al Qaeda as a hidden and organized network with sleeper cells across the world is largely a fantasy" (see "Editor's Cut," www.thenation.com). He said America "has become trapped by that fear." The film was well received in England, but US networks have turned it down.

THE JUNGLE REVISITED

■ Human Rights Watch has issued a report scoring the dangerous and inhumane working conditions in the meatpacking industry, which hires large numbers of immigrant workers and is largely nonunionized. Readers have followed this story in several *Nation* articles, including Marc Cooper's "The Heartland's Raw Deal," February 3, 1997. The HRW report, *Blood, Sweat and Fear: Workers' Rights in U.S. Meat and Poultry Plants*, was written by former *Nation* contributor Lance Compa.

THIS WEEK ON THE WEB

■ A federal magistrate in Georgia sentenced eleven people to prison for up to six months for acts of nonviolent civil disobedience during last November's protest demonstration at the School of the Americas, which has earned a reputation for teaching torture and coercive tactics. Read Patrick Mulvaney's report. Also: Robert L. Borosage's decoding of Bush's SOTU and Jason Vest's examination of the latest manifesto from the neocons at the Project for the New American Century (www.thenation.com).

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ALEXANDER COCKBURN

Ward Churchill and the Mad Dogs of the Right

When it comes to left and right, meaning the contrapuntal voices of sanity and dementia, we're meant to keep two sets of books.

Start with sanity, in the form of Ward Churchill, a prof at the University of Colorado. Churchill is known as a fiery historian and writer, often on Indian topics. Back in 2001, after 9/11, Churchill wrote an essay called "Some People Push Back," making the simple point, in a later summary, that "if U.S. foreign policy results in massive death and destruction abroad, we cannot feign innocence when some of that destruction is returned."

That piece was developed into a book, *On the Justice of Roosting Chickens*. About those killed in the 9/11 attacks, Churchill wrote recently, "It is not disputed that the Pentagon was a military target, or that a CIA office was situated in the World Trade Center. Following the logic by which U.S. Defense Department spokespersons have consistently sought to justify target selection in places like Baghdad, this placement of an element of the American 'command and control infrastructure' in an ostensibly civilian facility converted the Trade Center itself into a 'legitimate' target."

At this point Churchill could have specifically mentioned the infamous bombing of the Amariya civilian shelter in Baghdad in January 1991, with 400 deaths, almost all women and children, all subsequently identified and named by the Iraqis. To this day the US government says it was an OK target.

Churchill concludes, "If the U.S. public is prepared to accept these 'standards' when they are routinely applied to other people, they should not be surprised when the same standards are applied to them. It should be emphasized that I applied the 'little Eichmanns' characterization only to those [World Trade Center workers] described as 'technicians.' Thus, it was obviously not directed to the children, janitors, food service workers, firemen and random passers-by killed in the 9-1-1 attack. According to Pentagon logic, [they] were simply part of the collateral damage. Ugly? Yes. Hurtful? Yes. And that's my point. It's no less ugly, painful or dehumanizing a description when applied to Iraqis, Palestinians, or anyone else." I'm glad he puts that gloss in about the targets, thus clarifying what did read to some like a blanket stigmatization of the WTC inhabitants in his original paper.

A storm has burst over Churchill's head, with protests by Governor Pataki and others at his scheduled participation in a panel at Hamilton College called "Limits of Dissent?" In Colorado he's resigned his chairmanship of the department of ethnic studies, and politicians, fired up by the mad dogs on the *Wall Street Journal* editorial page and by Lord O'Reilly of the Loofah on Fox, are howling for his eviction from his job (Loofah? See O'Reilly's lewd fantasies: www.counterpunch.org/cockburn11272004.html).

Why should Churchill apologize for anything? Is it a crime to say that chickens can come home to roost and that the way to protect American lives from terrorism is to respect international law? I don't think he should have resigned as department chair. Let them drag him out by main force.

So much for the voice of sanity. Now for the dementia of the right. *The New Republic*'s Tom Frank (not the Frank, please note, who just wrote a book about Kansas) describes in *TNR* how he recently sat in on an antiwar panel in Washington.

Frank listened to Stan Goff, a former Delta Force soldier and current organizer for Military Families Speak Out, who duly moved Frank to write that "what I needed was a Republican like Arnold [Schwarzenegger] who would walk up to [Goff] and punch him in the face." Then upon Frank's outraged ears fell the views of *International Socialist Review* editorial board member Sherry Wolf, who asserted that Iraqis had a "right" to rebel against occupation, prompting *TNR*'s man to confide to his readers that "these weren't harmless lefties. I didn't want Nancy Pelosi talking sense to them; I wanted John Ashcroft to come busting through the wall with a submachine gun to round everyone up for an immediate trip to Gitmo, with Charles Graner on hand for interrogation." After Wolf quoted Booker Prize–winning author Arundhati Roy's defense of the right to resist, Frank mused, "Maybe sometimes you just want to be on the side of whoever is more likely to take a bunker buster to Arundhati Roy."

Now suppose Churchill had talked about Schwarzenegger's war on the poor in California and called on someone to punch the guv in the face, or have a jovial Graner force Pataki to masturbate what remain of Schwarzenegger's steroid-shriveled genitals, or have Ann Coulter rub her knickers in his face or get blown up by a bomb? He'd be out of his job in a minute.

Right-wing mad dogs are licensed to write anything, and in our Coulter-culture they do, just so they can burnish their profiles and get invited on Fox or CNN talk shows. Why else would Tony Blankley call on the *Washington Times* editorial page for Hersh to be imprisoned or shot for treason? But it's a PR game only right-wingers are allowed to play.

After savaging Churchill, the mad dogs of the right turned their sights on Shahid Alam, a professor of economics at Northeastern University in Boston. Alam, author of the excellent *Poverty From the Wealth of Nations*, wrote a column for the *CounterPunch* website in December in which he argued that the 9/11 attacks were an Islamist insurgency, the attackers believing that they were fighting—as the American revolutionaries did, in the 1770s—for their freedom and dignity against foreign occupation/control of their lands. Second, he argued that these attacks were the result of the political failure of Muslims to resist their tyrannies locally. It was a mistake, Alam said, to attack the Twin Towers and the Pentagon. Now he has been labeled "an un-American" professor by Fox News, and there's an Internet campaign to have him stripped of his faculty position. So write to all the appropriate names, defending Churchill and Alam; and if you feel like an outing to execrate Frank and *The New Republic*, there'll be a demonstration sponsored by the DC Anti-War Network, the DC chapter of the ISO and others at 5 PM on Friday, February 11, outside *TNR*'s DC editorial offices at 1331 H Street NW. ■

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KATHA POLLITT

Summers of Our Discontent

As the saying goes, behind every successful woman is a man who is surprised. Harvard president Larry Summers apparently is that man. A distinguished economist who was Treasury Secretary under Clinton, Summers caused a firestorm on January 14 when, speaking from notes at a conference on academic diversity, he argued that tenured women are rare in math and science for three reasons, which he listed in descending order of importance. One, women choose family commitments over the eighty-hour weeks achievement in those fields requires; two, fewer women than men have the necessary genetic gifts; and three, women are discriminated against. Following standard economic theory, Summers largely discounted discrimination: A first-rate woman rejected by one university would surely be snapped up by a rival. We're back to women's lack of commitment and brainpower.

On campus, Summers has lost big—he has had to apologize, appoint a committee and endure many a hairy eyeball from the faculty, and complaints from furious alumnae like me. In the press, he's done much better: Provocative thinker brought down by PC feminist mob! Women *are* dumber! Steven Pinker says so! The *New York Times* even ran a supportive op-ed by Charles Murray without identifying him as the co-author of *The Bell Curve*, the discredited farrago of racist claptrap. While much was made of MIT biologist Nancy Hopkins walking out of his talk—what about free speech, what about Truth?—we heard little about how Summers, who says he only wanted to spark a discussion, has refused to release his remarks. The bold challenger of campus orthodoxy apparently doesn't want the world to know what he actually said.

Do men have an innate edge in math and science? Perhaps someday we will live in a world free of the gender bias and stereotyping we know exists today both in and out of the classroom, and we will be able to answer that question, if anyone is still asking it. But we know we don't live in a bias-free world now: Girls are steered away from math and science from the moment they are born. The interesting fact is that, thanks partly to antidiscrimination laws that have forced open closed doors, they have steadily increased their performance nonetheless. Most of my Radcliffe classmates remember being firmly discouraged from anything to do with numbers or labs; one was flatly told that women couldn't be physicians—at her Harvard med school interview. Today women obtain 48 percent of BAs in math, 57 percent in biology and agricultural science, half of all places in med school, and they are steadily increasing their numbers as finalists in the Intel high school science contest (fifteen out of forty this year, and three out of four in New York City).

Every gain women have made in the past 200 years has been in the face of experts insisting they couldn't do it and didn't really want to. Biology, now trotted out to "prove" women's incapacity for math and science, used to "prove" that they shouldn't go to college at all. As women progress, the proponents of innate inferiority simply adapt their arguments to explain why further advancement is unlikely. But how can we know that in 2005, any more than we knew it in 1905? I'd like to hear those experts explain this instead: The number of tenure offers to women at Harvard has gone down in each of Summers's three years as president, from nine in thirty-six tenures to three in thirty-two. (The year before his arrival, it was thirteen women out of thirty-six.) Surely women's genes have not deteriorated since 2001?

Whatever they may be in theory, in the workplace, biological incapacity and natural preference are the counters used to defend against accusations of discrimination. Summers argues that competition makes discrimination irrational; that wouldn't hold, though, if an entire field is pervaded with discrimination, if there's a consensus that women don't belong there and if female candidates are judged more harshly by all potential employers. It also doesn't work if the threat of competition isn't so credible: It will be a long time before the Ivies feel the heat from Northwestern, which has improved its profile by hiring the first-rate women they foolishly let go. The history of women and minorities in the workplace shows that vigorous enforcement of antidiscrimination law is what drives progress. Moreover, the competition argument can be turned against Summers: After all, given its prestige and wealth, Harvard could "compete" for women with any university on the planet. So why doesn't it?

This brings us to that eighty-hour week and women's domestic "choices." It's a truism that career ladders are based on the traditional male life plan—he knocks himself out in his 20s and 30s while his wife raises the kids, mends his socks and types his papers. If women had been included from the start, the ladder would look rather different—careers might peak later, taking a semester off to have a baby would not blot your copybook, women would not be expected to do huge amounts of academic service work and then be blamed at tenure time for not publishing more. By treating this work culture as fixed, and women as the problem, Summers lets academia off the hook. Yet Harvard, with its $23 billion endowment, doesn't even offer free daycare to grad students.

There's a ton of research on all the subjects raised by Summers—the socialization of girls; conscious and unconscious gender bias in teaching, hiring and promotion; what makes talented females, like Intel finalists, drop out of science at every stage; what makes motherhood so hard to combine with a career. We are past the day when brilliant women could be expected to sit quietly while a powerful man parades his ignorance of that scholarship and of their experience. It is not "provocative" when the president of Harvard justifies his university's lamentable record by recalling that his toddler daughter treated toy trucks like dolls. It's an insult to his audience. What was his point, anyway? That she'll grow up and flunk calculus? That she'll get a job in a daycare center?

If Summers wants to know why women are underrepresented in math and science, he should do his homework, beginning with Nancy Hopkins's pathbreaking 1999 study of bias against female faculty at MIT. And then he should ask them. ■

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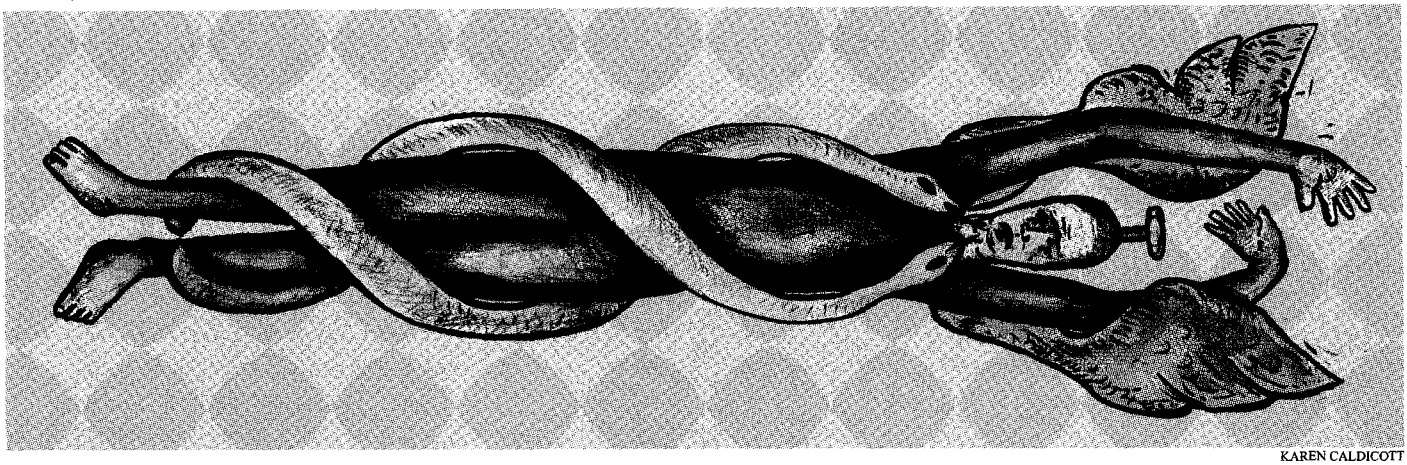
ARTICLES



KAREN CALDICOTT

WHEN GETTING SICK MEANS GOING BROKE

Your Money or Your Life

DAN FROSCH

Five long years ago, Rose Shaffer's life seemed sweet. A nurse since the early 1970s, Shaffer had spent most of her sixty years working at various Chicago hospitals, rising through the caregiver ranks and raising three kids. Now in the twilight of her career, she'd been hired as director of nursing at a home health agency in the suburb of Lombard. The position made Shaffer proud—she knew her salary could pay off the mortgage on her house a little sooner. At the time, her cousin Barack Obama was fast becoming a rising star in the Illinois State Senate.

Seven months into her new job, Shaffer suffered a heart attack, and an ambulance rushed her to Advocate South Suburban Hospital. Shaffer assumed she was automatically covered—health insurance was a given at her previous nursing jobs. She thought she'd filled out the proper forms. But she hadn't.

A week later, Shaffer received a bill from Advocate for the three days she'd been hospitalized. It was for $18,000. Shortly thereafter, Advocate began sending letters to Shaffer demanding payment. Then, a summons to appear in court was tossed on her porch. Advocate was suing her.

Shaffer was terrified and didn't show at her court date. She says she even received a letter from the Cook County Sheriff's Department, threatening arrest unless she appeared. Under pressure from Advocate and now behind on her mortgage payments, Shaffer filed for Chapter 13 bankruptcy in December 2002, which meant her debtors would garner a reduced portion of the money she owed.

"The hospital saved my life, but now they were trying to kill me," Shaffer says.

Rose Shaffer's experience has become disquietingly common. Since 2000, Harvard associate medical professors Steffie Woolhandler and David Himmelstein, along with Harvard law professor Elizabeth Warren and Ohio University sociology and anthropology professor Deborah Thorne, have been compiling data on bankruptcies in the United States. Their study, published on February 2 by the medical policy journal *Health Affairs*, found that between 1981 and 2001, medical-related bankruptcies increased by 2,200 percent, an astonishing explosion in a relatively short period of time. This spike far outpaced the 360 percent growth in all personal bankruptcies during roughly the same period.

In addition, the study uncovered surprising information about the affected population. While poor, uninsured Americans have long been the most obvious victims of a defective healthcare system, it's the middle class that suffers most in this case, accounting for about 90 percent of all medical bankruptcies, says Warren.

"The people we found to be profoundly affected are not some distant underclass. They're the very heart of the middle class," Warren says. "These are educated Americans with decent jobs, homes and families. But one stumble, and they end up in complete financial collapse, wiped out by medical bills."

With so many middle-class American households potentially vulnerable, you might think politicians would seek a solution sensitive to their interests. Yet the momentum in Washington is in the opposite direction—toward bankruptcy "reform" that would make things worse for people who have been financially ruined by illness.

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Until twenty-five years ago, filing for bankruptcy because of debts from a medical problem was virtually unheard of. In 1981, University of Texas law professors conducting bankruptcy research noticed that a handful of the debtors they were studying could never quite pay off their medical bills, but while these bills certainly didn't help, they weren't forcing people into bankruptcy.

Today, by contrast, medical-related debt is the second leading cause of personal bankruptcies, topped only by job loss. Edward Janger, a professor at Brooklyn Law School, gives two reasons for the change: First, there's been a dramatic rise in healthcare costs. In 2002 Americans paid an average of $5,440 in medical expenditures, up $419 from the previous year. A September 2004 study by Families USA found that 14.3 million Americans now hemorrhage more than a quarter of their earnings into healthcare costs.

Today, medical-related debt is the second leading cause of personal bankruptcies, topped only by job loss.

Second, the past fifteen years have seen a tremendous spike in the number of Americans who either don't have health insurance or have such skeletal coverage they might as well have none—there are currently some 45 million uninsured Americans, a jump of 10 million since 1990.

"What you're seeing in the bankruptcy numbers is a function of the fact that we have a very thin social safety net in this country in terms of health care," Janger says.

The *Health Affairs* study, which looked specifically at a cross section of 1,771 bankruptcies filed in 2001, concluded that the average medical debtor was a 41-year-old homeowning woman, with children and at least some education. The study also found that a majority of middle-class debtors had health insurance both when they first grew sick and at the actual time they filed, another surprise. Insurance alone, it turns out, doesn't prevent medical bankruptcy, because it is often too porous to provide a real buffer against the financial burden of a serious illness.

"A lot of people were bankrupted because of co-payments, deductibles or uncovered services, which added up to thousands of dollars in bills," says Steffie Woolhandler.

The story of Judy and Phil Specht shows how quickly livelihoods and bank accounts can collapse in the shadow of an illness, even when people initially have health insurance. It also demonstrates how medical problems, when coupled with job loss, can be particularly devastating—many debtors grappled with medical debt and income loss simultaneously, according to the *Health Affairs* study.

In 2001 the Spechts were living comfortably in Albuquerque, New Mexico, having worked at solid jobs there for years—Judy at a Philips semiconductor factory and Phil as a maintenance man at a retirement community. Together, the Spechts were bringing in around $40,000, which in New Mexico was enough to make the $787 monthly mortgage payment on their new home and still have a little left. Lately, Phil hadn't been feeling great—his body ached more than usual—but the Spechts both had health coverage through their jobs. In their late 50s, they were near enough retirement to taste it.

By 2002, though, Phil had grown worse, and after a series of tests, doctors diagnosed myelodysplastic syndrome, a bone-marrow disease that can cause leukemia. Phil retired and began collecting $1,080 a month in Social Security disability payments.

"I still had a good paying job with insurance that could cover us both, so I thought we'd be OK," Judy says.

But when Philips started shuttering some of its New Mexico factories three months later, Judy was laid off. She quickly found a job working at another semiconductor company, but after five months she was axed again. Now desperate, Judy took a housecleaning job at near-minimum wage. It was all she could find.

Fortunately, the Spechts only paid $50 a month for Phil's visits to University of New Mexico Hospital oncologists, thanks to UNM's charity care. But they had trouble affording the regular blood work Phil needed and the monthly $507 in prescription drug payments for both of them, climbing quickly because Judy developed high blood pressure, high cholesterol, acid reflux and an underactive thyroid—"stuff I hadn't experienced before this."

To save money, Judy chopped her blood pressure and thyroid tablets in half, took the acid-reflux medication less often than prescribed and quit her cholesterol pills altogether. "I was left with a choice of my medication or a roof over our heads."

To afford Phil's medicine, the Spechts sold their furniture, some jewelry and a camera. But by the end of 2003, $4,000 deep in medical debt and with $90,000 still left on their mortgage, the Spechts knew they couldn't hold on to their house any longer.

They hired a bankruptcy lawyer and filed for Chapter 7, freeing them from debt but eviscerating their credit for seven to ten years. The bank foreclosed on their mortgage, and the Spechts moved twice before settling in a cheap apartment for people over 55. Although they now participate in a new state program that offers drug discounts to elderly New Mexicans, the Spechts still owe $1,000 in medical bills; even after filing for bankruptcy, the couple continued to rack up bills until Judy finally landed a state job that gave her health coverage. The stress of the past three years has changed the Spechts forever. Judy describes the whole process as "frightening and humiliating."

"We'd wanted to retire in that house. We were heartbroken," she says.

The nightmare lived by the Spechts and other Americans could become even more harrowing if some members of Congress have their way. For years now, a powerful coalition of banks and credit-card companies has been lobbying Congress to make it harder to file for Chapter 7 bankruptcy, which cancels personal debt, in favor of Chapter 13, which involves paying back a portion over a period of time. As the number of personal bankruptcies has surged—from approximately 718,000 in 1990 to 1.54 million in 2004—banks and credit-card companies say, they've lost billions of dollars in canceled payments.

Republicans, and some Democrats, have long been pushing a

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bill that would create a means test for debtors who want to file for bankruptcy, preventing anyone who makes over the median income in their home state from filing for Chapter 7, but allowing them to file for Chapter 13. The idea, proponents say, is to make debtors take better care of their money.

Although the bill has failed in years past, Iowa's GOP Senator Chuck Grassley, buoyed by Republican Congressional gains and past support from moderate Democrats like minority leader Harry Reid, recently reintroduced the legislation. "People who have the ability to repay some or all of their debt should not be able to use bankruptcy as a financial planning tool so they get out of paying their debt scot-free while honest Americans who play by the rules have to foot the bill," says Grassley's spokesperson Jill Kozeny. Kozeny also notes that medical expenses would be deductible under the means test, and that adjustments to the test would be allowed if debtors show "special circumstances."

Medical debtors suffer real hardship, so it's hard to believe they're simply freeloading off the system, as GOP rhetoric suggests.

Jim Manley, Reid's communications director, says Reid will support the legislation, which he believes will force people to "take a measure of personal responsibility" for their financial affairs. Reid and some other Democrats will insist that it contain a provision preventing abortion clinic protesters from filing for bankruptcy to avoid paying legal fines (a practice that Reid, who is antichoice, nonetheless opposes). Such a provision was added to the 2002 version of the bill in an attempt to give political cover to Democrats (including Senators Chuck Schumer and Hillary Clinton) who voted for it.

The legislation has nonetheless elicited some principled and vigorous Democratic opposition, from John Kerry, Jon Corzine, Dick Durbin and Ted Kennedy, among others. The bill's critics argue that it will squeeze the lower middle class right out of the system. This demographic, they say, might still earn above their state's median income, deductions notwithstanding, yet may not be able to afford to hire an attorney to prove through litigation that their story is exceptional.

Moreover, says Elizabeth Warren, there's a good chance many middle-class debtors wouldn't even be able to make Chapter 13 repayments. Nearly two-thirds of those who file for Chapter 13 aren't able to pay up, leaving them vulnerable to creditors for years, she notes.

"The catastrophic problems which cause families to file for bankruptcy are not properly addressed by imposing greater requirements on people trying to get a fresh start," adds Ralph Mabey, co-chair of the legislation committee for the National Bankruptcy Conference, a national collective of bankruptcy experts that opposes the legislation.

Medical debtors, as the *Health Affairs* study shows, are suffering real hardship, which makes it hard to believe they are simply shirking their obligations and freeloading off the system, as Republican rhetoric suggests. In the two years before filing, 22 percent of families in the study went without food, 30 percent had a utility shut off, 61 percent went without important medical care and half failed to fill a doctor's prescription.

"The bill is written against a template that everyone has overspent, including those with breast cancer, those fighting chronic illness, those who have lost children to cystic fibrosis or other terrible illnesses," says Warren. "It's like responding to a cholera outbreak by closing down the hospitals."

Whatever happens politically, the fate of medical debtors will also be shaped by several cases now winding through the courts. Last summer, law firms filed numerous lawsuits against nonprofit hospitals for overcharging uninsured patients, a practice that often contributes to bankruptcy. Attorney Richard Scruggs, who headed government lawsuits against big tobacco companies, is leading the federal effort.

On the state level, a class-action suit is pending in Illinois that involves Advocate, the source of Rose Shaffer's troubles. In November 2003 seven former patients filed the suit, charging Advocate with imposing discriminatory pricing (the number has since risen to seventeen). There is ample evidence for their claims. In March 2003 the Service Employees International Union, the nation's largest healthcare union and an adversary of Advocate in organizing campaigns, released a study on the collection practices of fifty-nine Cook County hospitals. Advocate, which operates six hospitals in the county, ranked worst. According to SEIU, Advocate charged uninsured patients 139 percent more than their insured counterparts and was three times as likely to sue as other local hospitals. A month after the report's release, Advocate announced an increase in charity care for patients who couldn't pay. But for Rose Shaffer and others, it was too late. Later that year SEIU and Barack Obama brought Shaffer to Springfield to tell her story to the State Assembly.

"Advocate fails to provide automatic charity care discounts to the poor, and as a result the uninsured are still victimized by aggressive pricing and collections tactics," says Joseph Geevarghese, director of SEIU's Hospital Accountability Project. Advocate, which says it offers among the nation's most generous charity care, filed a motion to dismiss and a counterclaim against SEIU, accusing the union of defamation. The motion was denied last November, but Advocate plans on refiling. The lawsuit will likely be tried this year.

Still, University of North Carolina associate law professor Melissa Jacoby, who testified before Congress last summer on how hospital collection practices can cause bankruptcy, doesn't think litigation on its own will right the system. "Hospitals with the most egregious practices certainly should clean up their acts," she says, "but millions of people will still experience medical-related financial problems and their consequences, including debt collection and bankruptcy."

Jay Westbrook, a University of Texas law professor who co-wrote the 1981 bankruptcy study, believes bankruptcy patterns are an indicator of other social problems—high unemployment, rising divorce rates (people often file for bankruptcy after a divorce) and, in this case, a crumbling healthcare system. "Bankruptcy occurs when there is a crisis. That's what it's there for," Westbrook says.

A study by the Center for Studying Health System Change shows that 20 million families struggled with medical debt in 2003. Federal projections suggest that out-of-pocket health expenses will rise at least until 2013. Elizabeth Warren and Steffie

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Woolhandler foresee medical bankruptcies continuing to climb as the uninsured population swells, overburdened hospitals aggressively collect to meet the bottom line, prescription drug prices increase and employers shift medical costs to employees.

The only real cure for the medical bankruptcy epidemic, according to Physicians for a National Health Program, is national health insurance—a system where coverage isn't linked to employment and medically necessary care is accessible to all without deductibles or copayments. If such sweeping reform seems a long way off, there are short-term fixes too. One would be to exempt medical debtors from any new laws restricting bankruptcies. "The bankruptcy courthouse doors must stay open for those who really need it," says Warren. Another worthwhile improvement, notes Henry Sommer, president of the National Association of Consumer Bankruptcy Attorneys, would be to better protect the homes of medical debtors; many states allow people only a small amount of home equity after they've gone bankrupt.

But even modest measures to protect medical debtors face an increasingly unforgiving environment. Although the recent litigation will likely force some hospitals to rethink collection practices, there's evidence they are finding other ways to reclaim money, like pushing debtors toward lenders and hospital-sponsored credit cards. And the bankruptcy reform pending in Congress could hurl many more middle-class Americans into lifelong debt.

Rose Shaffer, for one, is still reeling. She works two nursing jobs, seven days a week for nearly sixty hours, so she can make the monthly $2,088 in Chapter 13 payments she still owes. Advocate has yet to claim its portion, but Shaffer's credit is severely damaged and will be for the next decade. She's praying her eleven-year-old car will make it through the Chicago winter.

"Sometimes I would start crying. I wished I was dead, but I was too big a coward to kill myself," Shaffer says. "I never thought my life would end up like this." ■

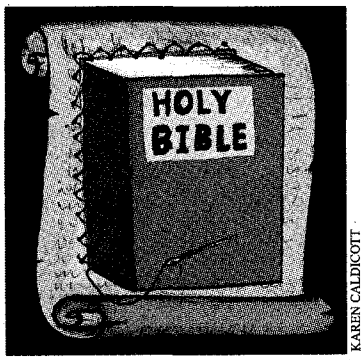
Meredith Clark writes about the impact of medical bills on young people at www.thenation.com.

THE FAITH OF OUR FOUNDING FATHERS DEFINITELY WASN'T CHRISTIANITY.

Our Godless Constitution

BROOKE ALLEN

It is hard to believe that George Bush has ever read the works of George Orwell, but he seems, somehow, to have grasped a few Orwellian precepts. The lesson the President has learned best—and certainly the one that has been the most useful to him—is the axiom that if you repeat a lie often enough, people will believe it. One of his Administration's current favorites is the whopper about America having been founded on Christian principles. Our nation was founded not on Christian principles but on Enlightenment ones. God only entered the picture as a very minor player, and Jesus Christ was conspicuously absent.



KAREN CALDICOTT

Our Constitution makes no mention whatever of God. The omission was too obvious to have been anything but deliberate, in spite of Alexander Hamilton's flippant responses when asked about it: According to one account, he said that the new nation was not in need of "foreign aid"; according to another, he simply said "we forgot." But as Hamilton's biographer Ron Chernow points out, Hamilton never forgot anything important.

In the eighty-five essays that make up *The Federalist*, God is mentioned only twice (both times by Madison, who uses the word, as Gore Vidal has remarked, in the "only Heaven knows" sense). In the Declaration of Independence, He gets two brief nods: a reference to "the Laws of Nature and Nature's God," and the famous line about men being "endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights." More blatant official references to a deity date from long after the founding period: "In God We Trust" did not appear on our coinage until the Civil War, and "under God" was introduced into the Pledge of Allegiance during the McCarthy hysteria in 1954 [see Elisabeth Sifton, "The Battle Over the Pledge," April 5, 2004].

In 1797 our government concluded a "Treaty of Peace and Friendship between the United States of America and the Bey and Subjects of Tripoli, or Barbary," now known simply as the Treaty of Tripoli. Article 11 of the treaty contains these words:

> As the Government of the United States…is not in any sense founded on the Christian religion—as it has in itself no character of enmity against the laws, religion, or tranquillity of Mussel-men—and as the said States never have entered into any war or act of hostility against any Mehomitan nation, it is declared by the parties that no pretext arising from religious opinions shall ever produce an interruption of the harmony existing between the two countries.

This document was endorsed by Secretary of State Timothy Pickering and President John Adams. It was then sent to the Senate for ratification; the vote was unanimous. It is worth pointing out that although this was the 339th time a recorded vote had been required by the Senate, it was only the third unanimous vote in the Senate's history. There is no record of debate or dissent. The text of the treaty was printed in full in the *Philadelphia Gazette*

Brooke Allen is the author of two collections of essays, Twentieth-Century Attitudes *and* Artistic License: Three Centuries of Good Writing and Bad Behavior *(Ivan R. Dee).*

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TO CONVICT ONE DOCTOR, ZEALOTS AT DEA TORE UP PAIN GUIDELINES DEVELOPED OVER FOUR YEARS.

Last August, after an historic collaboration between the Drug Enforcement Administration and the University of Wisconsin's Pain & Policy Studies Group, the DEA published new and widely applauded Pain Management Guidelines intended to protect physicians from prosecution by overzealous federal agents. In October the DEA suddenly withdrew the Guidelines, effectively trashing years of effort. Why?

According to the Washington Post, "The DEA's abrupt turnaround appeared to have been triggered when defense lawyers tried to introduce the new Guidelines in the trial of Dr. (William) Hurwitz" -- a Virginia pain specialist accused of over-prescribing. Shortly after the Guidelines were withdrawn, the US prosecutor successfully petitioned the court to exclude them as evidence.

In the Pain Guidelines, the doctors and the DEA had agreed that the government should stop investigating doctors like Hurwitz simply for being active in pain management -- and stop prosecuting those few who followed the recommendations but unwittingly prescribed opiates to deceitful patients. The DEA arbitrarily reversed that agreement.

Dr. David Joranson, head of the University of Wisconsin Group, says the "DEA's abrupt withdrawal of support for the [Guidelines] without consulting with coauthors about their concerns, raises questions about what advisory role, if any, the pain management community can expect to have with DEA." The agency's changes, he says, "are likely to interfere in medical practice and pain management."

His colleague, Dr. Russell Portenoy of Beth Israel Medical Center, told the Washington Post that the DEA has changed "the tone of the dialogue in a way that is very worrisome. We're seeing more of an emphasis on law enforcement and less on the legitimate use of prescription narcotics."

Over 30 million Americans suffer from chronic pain. Are we going to let them live in agony because of the misguided zealotry of federal prosecutors?

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and in two New York papers, but there were no screams of outrage, as one might expect today.

The Founding Fathers were not religious men, and they fought hard to erect, in Thomas Jefferson's words, "a wall of separation between church and state." John Adams opined that if they were not restrained by legal measures, Puritans—the fundamentalists of their day—would "whip and crop, and pillory and roast." The historical epoch had afforded these men ample opportunity to observe the corruption to which established priesthoods were liable, as well as "the impious presumption of legislators and rulers," as Jefferson wrote, "civil as well as ecclesiastical, who, being themselves but fallible and uninspired men, have assumed dominion over the faith of others, setting up their own opinions and modes of thinking as the only true and infallible, and as such endeavoring to impose them on others, hath established and maintained false religions over the greatest part of the world and through all time."

Franklin was well aware of the Machiavellian principle that one who aspires to influence the masses must profess religious sentiments.

If we define a Christian as a person who believes in the divinity of Jesus Christ, then it is safe to say that some of the key Founding Fathers were not Christians at all. Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson and Tom Paine were deists—that is, they believed in one Supreme Being but rejected revelation and all the supernatural elements of the Christian Church; the word of the Creator, they believed, could best be read in Nature. John Adams was a professed liberal Unitarian, but he, too, in his private correspondence seems more deist than Christian.

George Washington and James Madison also leaned toward deism, although neither took much interest in religious matters. Madison believed that "religious bondage shackles and debilitates the mind and unfits it for every noble enterprize." He spoke of the "almost fifteen centuries" during which Christianity had been on trial: "What have been its fruits? More or less in all places, pride and indolence in the Clergy, ignorance and servility in the laity, in both, superstition, bigotry, and persecution." If Washington mentioned the Almighty in a public address, as he occasionally did, he was careful to refer to Him not as "God" but with some nondenominational moniker like "Great Author" or "Almighty Being." It is interesting to note that the Father of our Country spoke no words of a religious nature on his deathbed, although fully aware that he was dying, and did not ask for a man of God to be present; his last act was to take his own pulse, the consummate gesture of a creature of the age of scientific rationalism.

Tom Paine, a polemicist rather than a politician, could afford to be perfectly honest about his religious beliefs, which were baldly deist in the tradition of Voltaire: "I believe in one God, and no more; and I hope for happiness beyond this life.... I do not believe in the creed professed by the Jewish church, by the Roman church, by the Greek church, by the Turkish church, by the Protestant church, nor by any church that I know of. My own mind is my own church." This is how he opened *The Age of Reason*, his virulent attack on Christianity. In it he railed against the "obscene stories, the voluptuous debaucheries, the cruel and torturous executions, the unrelenting vindictiveness" of the Old Testament, "a history of wickedness, that has served to corrupt and brutalize mankind." The New Testament is less brutalizing but more absurd, the story of Christ's divine genesis a "fable, which for absurdity and extravagance is not exceeded by any thing that is to be found in the mythology of the ancients." He held the idea of the Resurrection in especial ridicule: Indeed, "the wretched contrivance with which this latter part is told, exceeds every thing that went before it." Paine was careful to contrast the tortuous twists of theology with the pure clarity of deism. "The true deist has but one Deity; and his religion consists in contemplating the power, wisdom, and benignity of the Deity in his works, and in endeavoring to imitate him in every thing moral, scientifical, and mechanical."

Paine's rhetoric was so fervent that he was inevitably branded an atheist. Men like Franklin, Adams and Jefferson could not risk being tarred with that brush, and in fact Jefferson got into a good deal of trouble for continuing his friendship with Paine and entertaining him at Monticello. These statesmen had to be far more circumspect than the turbulent Paine, yet if we examine their beliefs it is all but impossible to see just how theirs differed from his.

Franklin was the oldest of the Founding Fathers. He was also the most worldly and sophisticated, and was well aware of the Machiavellian principle that if one aspires to influence the masses, one must at least profess religious sentiments. By his own definition he was a deist, although one French acquaintance claimed that "our free-thinkers have adroitly sounded him on his religion, and they maintain that they have discovered he is one of their own, that is that he has none at all." If he did have a religion, it was strictly utilitarian: As his biographer Gordon Wood has said, "He praised religion for whatever moral effects it had, but for little else." Divine revelation, Franklin freely admitted, had "no weight with me," and the covenant of grace seemed "unintelligible" and "not beneficial." As for the pious hypocrites who have ever controlled nations, "A man compounded of law and gospel is able to cheat a whole country with his religion and then destroy them under color of law"—a comment we should carefully consider at this turning point in the history of our Republic.

Here is Franklin's considered summary of his own beliefs, in response to a query by Ezra Stiles, the president of Yale. He wrote it just six weeks before his death at the age of 84.

> Here is my creed. I believe in one God, Creator of the universe. That he governs it by his providence. That he ought to be worshipped. That the most acceptable service we render to him is doing good to his other children. That the soul of Man is immortal, and will be treated with justice in another life respecting its conduct in this. These I take to be the fundamental points in all sound religion, and I regard them as you do in whatever sect I meet with them.
>
> As for Jesus of Nazareth, my opinion of whom you particularly desire, I think his system of morals and his religion, as he left them to us, the best the world ever saw or is likely to see; but I apprehend it has received various corrupting changes, and I have, with most of the present dissenters in England, some

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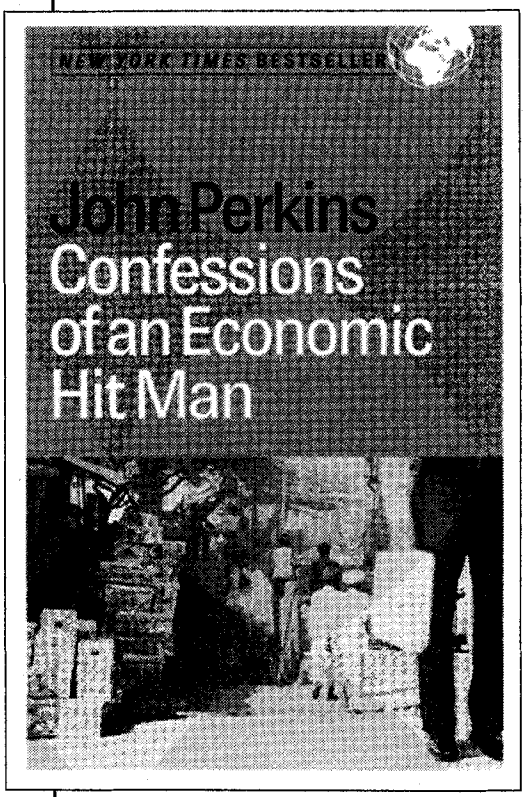

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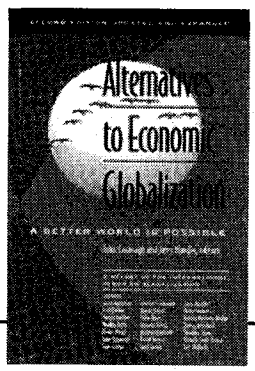

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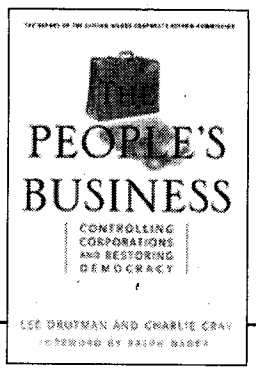

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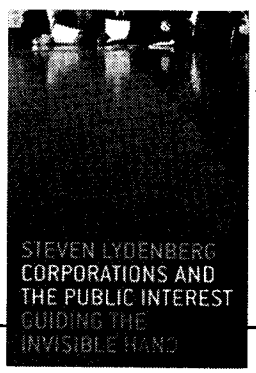

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> doubts as to his divinity; though it is a question I do not dogmatize upon, having never studied it, and think it needless to busy myself with now, when I expect soon an opportunity of knowing the truth with less trouble. I see no harm, however, in its being believed, if that belief has the good consequence, as it probably has, of making his doctrines more respected and better observed, especially as I do not perceive that the Supreme takes it amiss, by distinguishing the unbelievers in his government of the world with any particular marks of his displeasure.

Jefferson thoroughly agreed with Franklin on the corruptions the teachings of Jesus had undergone. "The metaphysical abstractions of Athanasius, and the maniacal ravings of Calvin, tinctured plentifully with the foggy dreams of Plato, have so loaded [Christianity] with absurdities and incomprehensibilities" that it was almost impossible to recapture "its native simplicity and purity." Like Paine, Jefferson felt that the miracles claimed by the New Testament put an intolerable strain on credulity. "The day will come," he predicted (wrongly, so far), "when the mystical generation of Jesus, by the supreme being as his father in the womb of a virgin, will be classed with the fable of the generation of Minerva in the brain of Jupiter." The Revelation of St. John he dismissed as "the ravings of a maniac."

In old age John Adams wrote Jefferson, 'This would be the best of all possible worlds, if there were no religion in it!'

Jefferson edited his own version of the New Testament, "The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth," in which he carefully deleted all the miraculous passages from the works of the Evangelists. He intended it, he said, as "a document in proof that I am a real Christian, that is to say, a disciple of the doctrines of Jesus." This was clearly a defense against his many enemies, who hoped to blacken his reputation by comparing him with the vile atheist Paine. His biographer Joseph Ellis is undoubtedly correct, though, in seeing disingenuousness here: "If [Jefferson] had been completely scrupulous, he would have described himself as a deist who admired the ethical teachings of Jesus as a man rather than as the son of God. (In modern-day parlance, he was a secular humanist.)" In short, not a Christian at all.

The three accomplishments Jefferson was proudest of—those that he requested be put on his tombstone—were the founding of the University of Virginia and the authorship of the Declaration of Independence and the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom. The latter was a truly radical document that would eventually influence the separation of church and state in the US Constitution; when it was passed by the Virginia legislature in 1786, Jefferson rejoiced that there was finally "freedom for the Jew and the Gentile, the Christian and the Mohammeden, the Hindu and infidel of every denomination"—note his respect, still unusual today, for the sensibilities of the "infidel." The University of Virginia was notable among early-American seats of higher education in that it had no religious affiliation whatever. Jefferson even banned the teaching of theology at the school.

If we were to speak of Jefferson in modern political categories, we would have to admit that he was a pure libertarian, in religious as in other matters. His real commitment (or lack thereof) to the teachings of Jesus Christ is plain from a famous throwaway comment he made: "It does me no injury for my neighbor to say there are twenty gods or no god. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg." This raised plenty of hackles when it got about, and Jefferson had to go to some pains to restore his reputation as a good Christian. But one can only conclude, with Ellis, that he was no Christian at all.

John Adams, though no more religious than Jefferson, had inherited the fatalistic mindset of the Puritan culture in which he had grown up. He personally endorsed the Enlightenment commitment to Reason but did not share Jefferson's optimism about its future, writing to him, "I wish that Superstition in Religion exciting Superstition in Polliticks…may never blow up all your benevolent and phylanthropic Lucubrations," but that "the History of all Ages is against you." As an old man he observed, "Twenty times in the course of my late reading have I been upon the point of breaking out, 'This would be the best of all possible worlds, if there were no religion in it!'" Speaking ex cathedra, as a relic of the founding generation, he expressed his admiration for the Roman system whereby every man could worship whom, what and how he pleased. When his young listeners objected that this was paganism, Adams replied that it was indeed, and laughed.

In their fascinating and eloquent valetudinarian correspondence, Adams and Jefferson had a great deal to say about religion. Pressed by Jefferson to define his personal creed, Adams replied that it was "contained in four short words, 'Be just and good.'" Jefferson replied, "The result of our fifty or sixty years of religious reading, in the four words, 'Be just and good,' is that in which all our inquiries must end; as the riddles of all priesthoods end in four more, 'ubi panis, ibi deus.' What all agree in, is probably right. What no two agree in, most probably wrong."

This was a clear reference to Voltaire's *Reflections on Religion*. As Voltaire put it:

> There are no sects in geometry. One does not speak of a Euclidean, an Archimedean. When the truth is evident, it is impossible for parties and factions to arise.... Well, to what dogma do all minds agree? To the worship of a God, and to honesty. All the philosophers of the world who have had a religion have said in all ages: "There is a God, and one must be just." There, then, is the universal religion established in all ages and throughout mankind. The point in which they all agree is therefore true, and the systems through which they differ are therefore false.

Of course all these men knew, as all modern presidential candidates know, that to admit to theological skepticism is political suicide. During Jefferson's presidency a friend observed him on his way to church, carrying a large prayer book. "You going to church, Mr. J," remarked the friend. "You do not believe a word in it." Jefferson didn't exactly deny the charge. "Sir," he replied, "no nation has ever yet existed or been governed without religion. Nor can be. The Christian religion is the best religion that has been given to man and I as chief Magistrate of this nation am bound to give it the sanction of my example. Good morning Sir."

Like Jefferson, every recent President has understood the necessity of at least paying lip service to the piety of most

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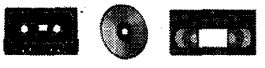

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American voters. All of our leaders, Democrat and Republican, have attended church, and have made very sure they are seen to do so. But there is a difference between offering this gesture of respect for majority beliefs and manipulating and pandering to the bigotry, prejudice and millennial fantasies of Christian extremists. Though for public consumption the Founding Fathers identified themselves as Christians, they were, at least by today's standards, remarkably honest about their misgivings when it came to theological doctrine, and religion in general came very low on the list of their concerns and priorities—always excepting, that is, their determination to keep the new nation free from bondage to its rule. ■

STRATEGIES THAT UNITE THE VAST MAJORITY AGAINST A TINY ELITE ARE SURE TO WIN.

Taking the Offensive on Wealth

GAR ALPEROVITZ

It's time for progressives to launch a comprehensive challenge to America's extreme concentration of income and wealth. This is not only morally and economically right; a number of developments suggest that it is also one of the areas where progressives can aggressively take the political offensive. As time goes on, the difficulties created by the Bush Administration's deficit-driven economic policies are likely to make this a winning strategy.

KAREN CALDICOTT

America has experienced what economist and *New York Times* op-ed columnist Paul Krugman calls "tectonic shifts" in income and wealth in recent years. The top 1 percent now claim more income each year than the bottom 100 million Americans taken together. An only slightly larger elite group, the top 5 percent, own just under 70 percent of financial wealth and more than 80 percent of unincorporated business assets. The economist and Nobel laureate Paul Samuelson has regularly dramatized what the general patterns mean. In the 1948 version of his widely used textbook, Samuelson wrote, "If we made...an income pyramid out of a child's play blocks with each layer portraying $1,000 of income, the peak would be far higher than the Eiffel Tower, but almost all of us would be within a yard of the ground." By the end of the century, Samuelson found that although there would be some modest alterations at the bottom, the world had changed so much the peak would be as high as Mount Everest.

Three powerful forces are making a serious challenge on issues of income and wealth politically feasible. The most important is the pain created by the Bush tax and budget cuts. At 17 percent in fiscal year 2003, federal revenues as a share of GDP are at their lowest level since 1959. The budget deficits are causing cutbacks everywhere, and this in turn is creating increasing problems at the state level and in local communities. Public services are being radically reduced; healthcare and state college tuition are increasingly unaffordable not only for the poor and working poor but for an embattled middle class; school budgets are under intense pressure, which is driving an increase in property taxes—the list is endless.

Ultimately, the political pressures resulting from the growing pain must find an outlet. Indeed, just beneath the surface of conventional press reporting, they already are. Consider these largely overlooked recent developments: In the November elections California voters comfortably approved tax increases on those making more than $1 million and earmarked the proceeds for mental health programs. Last year New Jersey enacted legislation taxing those making more than $500,000 in order to offset regressive property taxes. Since Bush took office in 2001, numerous states, red and blue, have decided not to repeal estate taxes, and many others have refused to go along with Bush-driven revisions of depreciation guidelines that reduce corporate taxes. Even the conservative Virginia State Senate approved legislation that would have raised income taxes on those making more than $150,000.

The egregious behavior of the very rich, along with recent shifts in income and wealth patterns, reinforces this logic. At one level is the ever more obvious routine corruption among the wealthy—from the brokerage and insurance-industry insider deals and the $9 billion cooking of the books by Fannie Mae executives to the New York Stock Exchange's self-dealing arrangements and the Enron, WorldCom and other scandals. At another level are outrageous consumption patterns among the elite. In recent years we have been treated to a $6,000 shower curtain and a $15,000 umbrella stand, and a $2 million birthday party for one boss's wife. Even the *Wall Street Journal* had difficulty disguising its dismay in a recent front-page report on the conspicuous-consumption race among billionaire yacht buyers.

A third reason that a challenge to these patterns is increasingly viable is what might be called the logic of small versus large numbers. Gene Sperling, Bill Clinton's former economic adviser, was one of the first to put his finger on the issue. Just before the attacks of September 11, 2001, Sperling proposed holding off "full repeal of the estate tax, and the second and third stages of the [Bush] tax cut for those in the top 2 percent" so funds could be made available to help keep Social Security solvent. The proposal would save more than $1 trillion and would insure that 98 percent of Americans would still "get their full tax cut."

A few months later the Senate's liberals joined in. The late Paul Wellstone proposed freezing future tax reductions for the top 1 percent. Ted Kennedy proposed delaying tax cuts for fami-

Gar Alperovitz is Lionel R. Bauman Professor of Political Economy at the University of Maryland. This article draws upon his recently published America Beyond Capitalism *(Wiley).*

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lies with incomes over $130,000. Even conservative Democrat Joseph Lieberman urged postponing both the full repeal of the estate tax and reductions in the top tax rates. By the fall of 2003 all the Democratic presidential candidates had put forward one or another variation on the same general theme. Strategies that offer gains to 98–99 percent and losses only to the extremely wealthy 1–2 percent are all but certain to increase their appeal over time.

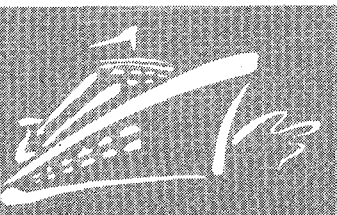
A further, critical point: Though exaggerated in many accounts, so-called moral issues involving abortion and gay marriage were important parts of conservative strategy during the 2004 election—especially among Catholic Latinos, who now outnumber blacks. The only way to offset right-wing divide-and-conquer strategies is with another, more powerful—and more powerfully dramatized—economic strategy that unites the vast majority across racial and ethnic lines.

Democrats have been frightened to open a full-blown challenge to what is going on, in part because many of them have depended significantly on financial support from the wealthy and from corporate funders and their lobbies. What the Dean campaign, MoveOn.org and ultimately the Kerry campaign demonstrated is that sources of funding are now available that could open the way for a new populism by freeing serious progressive candidates from this restraint. Democrats have also been cautious because they fear being tagged with charges of waging "class war." The truth is that *Bush's* policies are class warfare. It is simply time to call his bluff. Boldness, as the Dean campaign also demonstrated, creates its own energy. It is high time progressives called a spade a spade.

A fully developed strategy based on the logic of pain and the logic of small versus large numbers would involve four key elements, at both the state and national levels. The place to start is with state-by-state adaptations of measures like those in California and New Jersey, which link elite tax increases to the solution of specific problems like mental health services or insupportable property taxes. Education, tuition relief and medical care for the elderly and the poor are obvious candidates. State luxury taxes on yachts, expensive cars and high-priced second and third homes could also help focus the central issue.

Taxes based on principles like those that have been effective in California and New Jersey should also be proposed at the federal level—along with the rescinding of Bush's tax cuts. They should be followed by an overall revision of taxes with a return to the 50 percent top marginal tax rates of the first Reagan Administration. (Throughout the postwar boom, federal income taxes for the very top brackets were set at 91 percent. The rate was reduced to 77 percent in 1964 and 70 percent in 1965, and remained at that level or higher until the Reagan era.)

A second obvious target is corporate tax giveaways at both the state and federal levels. Corporate taxes have declined from 35 percent of federal revenues to 7.4 percent over the past half-century. This past year, corporations received an additional $137 billion in legislated cuts. A dual campaign—focusing on growing corporate corruption and excessive executive compensation, along with the pressing need for revenues—could establish the political basis for a comprehensive, longer-term overhaul of corporate tax policy. Several states have demonstrated that this is feasible. New Jersey, for instance, more than doubled its corporate tax levy in 2002—after twenty years of declining tax revenue.



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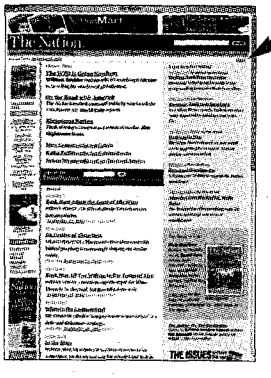

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A third, longer-term element would involve wealth taxes at both the state and national levels, as urged by economist Edward Wolff and constitutional expert Bruce Ackerman. Wealth taxes, common throughout Europe and in most other advanced nations, must ultimately become part of a serious tax program here. A US tax based on the modest Swiss system (marginal rates between 0.05 percent and 0.3 percent, after exempting the first $100,000) could yield an estimated $60–$70 billion this year. A tax based on the Swedish system could yield upwards of $600 billion.

Wealth taxes are common in the United States, but only on the kind of wealth owned by most people: their home. (Moreover, such taxes apply to the total value of the home, not to what people actually own as equity, which is often only a small fraction of the value.) A "property tax on wealth" that allowed exemptions for modest holdings would bring the kind of wealth the very rich own—stocks and bonds—into the same tax net. A good place to begin would be to expand upon the modest tax on intangibles that states like Florida already have on their books.

A comprehensive approach would ultimately move beyond taxation and open up an entirely new area: direct wealth ownership benefiting the public rather than elites. Dramatizing the principle that alternative uses of wealth are both politically and economically feasible would involve two basic elements:

First, we should build up wealth-holding institutions that help solve social and economic problems both through local initiatives and through state and federal tax, loan, procurement technical assistance and other policies. A logical first step would be to expand upon the thirty-year trends that have already led to the creation of some 4,000–6,000 nonprofit corporations investing in neighborhood housing and businesses, and some 11,000 largely worker-owned firms, which stabilize and anchor jobs in communities across the nation. The latter are especially important as globalization continues to undermine local economies.

A second element in the effort to make wealth benefit the public directly would be to accelerate the use of public pension funds for local economic development—as states ranging from liberal California to conservative Alabama already do. (In some cases this may involve a political fight, as suggested by the recent ouster of Sean Harrigan, a union official, from the board of the California Public Employees Retirement System. The fact is, however, more than half the states already utilize some form of economically targeted investment strategy.) Beyond this are even more interesting possibilities for adaptation, like the Permanent Fund in Alaska, which owns and invests oil wealth on behalf of the public and provides each citizen of the state with dividends as a matter of right (almost $10,000 for a couple with three children in 2000).

In all of this, one other thing is required: Progressives need to grasp fully, and then communicate, the morally outrageous nature of what is happening in the wealthiest nation in the history of the world. The typical American full-time worker earned just $35,906 in 2003. The *total* income of the typical family (including spouse, etc.) came to just under $53,000. Try raising a family or think about sending your kids to college on that—and remember that roughly half of all families are below this figure. Meanwhile, to take just three examples: Richard Fuld Jr., chief executive of Lehman Brothers Holdings, made $67.7 million in 2003; George David of United Technologies made $70.5 million; and Reuben Mark of Colgate-Palmolive made $148 million. Something is powerfully amiss in this disparity and it is getting worse—something progressives have not yet found a way to fully dramatize.

Pollster Stan Greenberg and others have suggested that John Kerry's failure to put forward a compelling economic vision was one of the most important reasons he lost the presidency, especially in states like Ohio. There are increasing signs that Republican politicians are by no means as united as the November election results seemed to suggest. Many, facing their own constituents in a nonpresidential year, are unlikely to go along with, or continue to defend, the ever-growing Bush deficits. The time is ripe for an all-out effort to demand change—and to force the other side to attempt to defend what is in fact indefensible. ■

LETTERS
CONTINUED

(Continued From Page 2)

with the positions Schlesinger took at the time. Wreszin would be on firmer ground if he were arguing with the particulars of anything I actually wrote. The two columns to which he refers were indeed "selective" in that they discussed none of the events in Schlesinger's career. In fact, they discussed Schlesinger in only a few paragraphs of one column and mentioned him only four times in the course of the 2,600-word total for two columns. The references add up to far fewer words than Wreszin takes to argue with me. Perhaps he has a case in some of his particulars, perhaps not. (I certainly disagree with Schlesinger's assessment of *Naming Names*.)

Nevertheless, I took no position on the substance of Schlesinger's positions over the course of his sixty years in politics except to note that he and John Kenneth Galbraith "made their share of mistakes, political and intellectual. But they were not the most costly kind, thanks to an unyielding commitment of both the economist and the historian to battling the effects of extremism of all stripes." Wreszin pretends to read in this an endorsement of all of Schlesinger's decisions. His dishonesty in doing so is patent in his characterization of my work when he writes, "Alterman waxes eloquent about the Milan Conference sponsored by the Committee for Cultural Freedom, funded by the CIA." Here is my reference to the conference in its entirety: "Mattson's invaluable new study, *When America Was Great: The Fighting Faith of Postwar Liberalism*, quotes Galbraith at a Congress of Cultural Freedom gathering in Milan in 1955, attacking intellectuals who treat their ideological constructs as reality." Obviously, I did not "wax eloquent." I did not "wax" at all. I merely identified the location of Galbraith's remarks, quoting the original source. Is this somehow objectionable?

The cold war was a far more complex matter than can be appreciated in the course of a polemical letter that offers no context or competing arguments for its angry indictments. I have neither the time nor the space to be drawn into the complicated particulars of the anecdotes that Wreszin seems to believe prove his point. This is not due to "historical amnesia." I assure him that I am fully "aware" of the "darker side of... cold war history." Indeed, I earned my PhD in the subject. I simply see that history differently from Wreszin.

Nothing in his letter inspires me to wish to reconsider my view that both Galbraith and Schlesinger served their nation and their ideals quite honorably during the course of their careers. It is no crime that Wreszin, too, has been "selective" in his choices of anecdotes and the manner in which he portrays them. Selectivity is unavoidable for both the historian and the journalist. He would be a better polemicist, however, if he understood as much.

ERIC ALTERMAN

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BOOKS & THE ARTS

Uneasy Rider

BENJAMIN KUNKEL

AMERICAN PURGATORIO.
By John Haskell.
Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 239 pp. $23.

It's not often that a new style appears in American prose, but this is what happened with John Haskell's first book, a collection of short stories called *I am not Jackson Pollock*. The title indicated Haskell's interest in unhappy celebrity (Pollock, Orson Welles, Glenn Gould, the doomed actress Capucine, the electrocuted elephant Topsy) as well as his preoccupation with the matter of style: Pollock, after all, has the most recognizable idiom of any American painter, and you don't evoke him without drawing attention to your own brush strokes. Haskell's method was and is very far from Pollock's lyrical turbulence. His stories might concern rare and remarkable people, but they consist of recycled language ("Paris, it's been said, is the city of lovers") and deliberate banality ("First she was born, then she grew up") delivered in a tone conversationally flat. On the feelings of Keats—preternaturally eloquent Keats!—for his adored Fanny Brawne: "There's the admiration and friendship and respect, but there's also this other thing, the sexual thing, and that was the thing he was feeling, walking along with Fanny in the north part of London."

Plenty of writers have used clichés and degraded language to satirical effect. Yet Haskell wasn't deadpanning, wasn't mocking xeroxed expressions or hand-me-down emotions. Not Jackson Pollock, this was—Andy Warhol. Indeed the stories had the ghostly cool, the flattened affect and of course the morbid fascination with celebrity of Warhol's silk-screens of Mao or Marilyn. They were also moving, a little, because Haskell tended to depict his iconic figures in situations of isolation or failure, often in extremis. (Capucine climbs out a ninth-floor window, Pollock runs his car into a tree.) It was as if Haskell's intentionally inadequate language mirrored these characters' helplessness. It was even as if through the medium of the anonymous, washed-out prose the celebrities were dissolving out of fame and cherished idiosyncrasy into plain common suffering.

Still, if you remember John Haskell's Orson Welles it's mostly because you remember Orson Welles. Haskell attained a genuine stylistic originality by appearing to avoid style altogether, but his reliance on ready-made phrases together with biographies of the stars and classic movies made it an originality of the already familiar, the minor originality of an age of mash-ups, remakes and novels about famous novelists. It was once supposed that as history progressed, children would be born older and older, until they emerged from the womb with white hair. In the arts something like this has proved true and, like many debuts, *I am not Jackson Pollock* seemed awfully wrinkled and creased with cultural history.

In his short stories, Haskell wore an air of coolness like a pair of sunglasses; in his first novel, he's achieved an authentic dark vision.

American Purgatorio, Haskell's first novel, is different. Here, his style has become the singular property of a Brooklynite named Jack whose wife has vanished from a New Jersey gas station. The blank, seemingly ingenuous, almost abstract prose now expresses one man's condition of bewildered grief. Before, Haskell wore an air of coolness like a pair of sunglasses; now he's achieved an authentic dark vision. Jack is dazed (and then bleakly renewed) by loss, and that is how he sounds.

Upon returning, by foot, to his and Anne's apartment, Haskell's narrator discovers in a drawer a map of the United States with Lexington, Kentucky; Boulder, Colorado; and San Diego circled on it. Neither reasonably nor unreasonably, he decides to

Benjamin Kunkel is an editor at n+1 *magazine. His first novel,* Indecision, *will be published in the fall by Random House.*

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follow this itinerary westward in search of his missing wife. A novel that begins at a "service station compound," with its narrator buying "a protein-style candy bar, and a so-called energy drink," tempts us to mistake it for satire or at least realism. Likewise when Haskell's narrator pulls off the Interstate in his new car to eat lunch with the hitchhiker he's picked up: "He was religious about his yoga, which is why, when we stopped at a roadside Kuntry Kitchen restaurant, while we were sitting at a table by the window waiting for the check, Alex slid out of the bench seat, stretched out on the smooth blue carpeting, and began a series of salutations to the sun." But Haskell's narrator isn't burlesquing either Kuntry Kitchen or sun salutations performed on its floor. His tone signals acceptance of all that's in the world. It's what is absent from the world, namely Anne, that afflicts him.

And yet Anne isn't quite a woman, not even a dead or missing woman. Even Jack's regular apostrophes to her ("Your arms. They're my favorite parts of your body...") don't entirely outfit her with three dimensions. Her name becomes equally a term for worldly desire and chimerical satisfaction, a principle of longing corresponding to that "lady sent from heaven," Beatrice, who beckons Dante through his Purgatorio. Any reader who doesn't accept the allegorical cast of Haskell's novel will be troubled by various problems of verisimilitude: Why doesn't Jack try to contact Anne's parents? Why doesn't he file a missing persons report? The better way to read the novel is as a quixotic campaign against loss that turns into a search for a means to stop searching.

Haskell titles each of his seven chapters after one of the seven deadly sins, but such parallels with Dante probably proved more useful to the author than they will to the reader. Dante's pilgrimage through purgatory was the arduous ascent of a fearsomely steep mountain, while Jack's loose trip rolls horizontally from coast to coast. And Jack is accompanied, in place of Dante's Virgil, by a changing cast of hippies, dropouts and artists, all of whom dispense real or ersatz wisdom with the earnest dippiness of American seekers. Alex, the yoga practitioner, advises Jack to

> "Take it off of yourself and put it into the world.... It won't go away if you keep pushing it away." Trying to get rid of it, he said, was just another way of holding on to it.
>
> I still wasn't sure what the "it" was we were talking about, but that was all right.

"It," we understand, even if Jack does not, is Jack's temporary anger (or sin number two, wrath) at Anne's disappearance. The passage serves as well as any other to illustrate Haskell's tolerant comedy. Alex may be sententious and slack, but he's not unwise.

The same might be said about Haskell's narrator himself. At first his dully throbbing voice symptomizes a state of dazzled grief. Later on, the carefully careless prose acquires the feel of letting go. When Jack recalls having given up the ambition of being a playwright, the analogy with seeking fugitive Anne goes without saying: "Growing up in Chicago I had, I don't know what to call it, a dream, I guess.... I felt I needed an identity, as a person. I needed something I could be, some thing, and I thought a playwright, that was something I could be, I could live with that." But Jack is a failure as a playwright:

> Maybe I had the wrong dream. But I didn't want to say that, I didn't want to admit defeat.... And I was walking along, in New York, on Wooster Street, it was Wooster Street because the sidewalk was bumpy and I had to keep my eyes down so as not to trip, and I was walking along, and all of a sudden I felt it snap. It snapped. The dream. The dream died. And I let it die. It didn't feel that bad. In fact it felt good. It felt like what it must feel like, or what I imagined it must feel like, when a dream comes true.

No other writer I know could wring such feeling from the prefab phrase "a dream come true."

American Purgatorio is a triumphant American picaresque, a thrilling quest poem in the indigenous form of a road novel.

It turns out that *American Purgatorio* concerns not so much the death or disappearance of a spouse as the living loss of oneself. After ditching his car near Phoenix ("named," he blankly states, "after a place named after a bird that rises from the ashes"), Jack reflects that "although I'd rid myself of possessions, I needed to get rid of some more, needed to rid myself of the habit of being what I was."

It's a commonplace of Marxist literary criticism that the inimitable personal styles of high Modernism—Woolf's nervous suavity, Faulkner's barreling sentences, Lawrence's prickly rhapsodies—constitute the acme of bourgeois individualism, if not a kind of late protest against mass society. Haskell's style is also unique, but unindividualistic. Here it's the distinctive voice of someone fading into anyone and, increasingly, no one. Jack, whose name, but not whose story, if you read this novel, you will immediately forget, is not quite egoless; but his ego, by the end, is like some disintegrating Buddhist prayer flag on a stupa, sun-worn and half-transparent as it ripples after the breeze.

American Purgatorio ostensibly tracks the seven deadly sins rather than the four noble truths. Still, it seems to me the most Buddhist English-language novel I have read. It's difficult to follow Haskell's narrator from Brooklyn, through Boulder (capital, if anywhere is, of Buddhist America), and finally to beachside nirvana in San Diego without thinking of the precepts of nonattachment, overcoming desire and the unreality of the self. Toward the end, Jack says, in what could almost be translation into contemporary vernacular of one of the ancient Pali texts, "I tried to see myself as reborn, but by this point I was getting a little tired of being constantly reborn." You might even say that Anne serves as an American name for the tempter Mara, personification of desire in the Buddhist cosmology. But this would be to miss Jack's mortal ambivalence: "Wanting life *is* life, and I'm not quite ready to give it up."

Haskell has by no means written a perfect book. He doesn't manage to dispel all questions of verisimilitude at the beginning; and, more damaging, in the last pages, when allegory turns to ghost story, he violates his novel's own peculiar coherence. And by depriving Jack of friends or family, he neglects to consider the price others pay for our enlightenment, their stubborn attachment to us even after we have won release. (The Buddha abandoned his wife and infant son: How did they feel about that?) Nevertheless, *American Purgatorio* is a triumphant American picaresque, a thrilling quest poem in the indigenous form of a road novel.

Another of these was written by Saul Bellow, and if there was a Jackson Pollock of the postwar American sentence, a reckless freestyle master, surely it was the Bellow of *The Adventures of Augie March*: "I am an American, Chicago-born—Chicago, that somber city—and go at things as I have taught myself...." Whereas Haskell commences with flamboyant flatness: "I'm from Chicago originally." The difference between the two first sentences is the difference between a high-spirited epic of self-assertion and a slender account of the

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threadbare ego. The difference is also probably between an America confidently coming into possession of the world, and an America anxious that its desires are consuming that world: a difference of fifty years. But in terms of successful originality, the two sentences, or rather the novels that they head, are not so very far apart. ■

A Buddha for the Blue States

DONALD S. LOPEZ JR.

AN END TO SUFFERING: The Buddha in the World.
By Pankaj Mishra. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 422 pp. $25.

Scholars of the New Testament speculate that the Gospel of Mark was the first of the canonical Gospels to be composed, sometime between 68 and 73 CE, or thirty-five to forty years after the Crucifixion. It was followed by Luke and Matthew, and then John, which was not composed until sometime between 90 and 110 CE. Jesus himself, of course, wrote nothing, so our understanding of his teachings relies on these rather belated accounts, from which Christians have drawn thousands of portraits of Jesus, both verbal and visual, portraits that are often in direct conflict with one another: gentle rabbi, revolutionary zealot, prophet of the end time, mystic of love, harbinger of the messiah, and the messiah himself.

What, then, can be said about the alternative Jesus, depicted (as his advocates like to point out) sitting in solitary meditation beneath a tree rather than nailed to a wooden cross? The encyclopedia will give the Buddha's dates as 563–483 BCE, but recent scholarship suggests that he may have lived as much as a century later. If something as straightforward as the years of his birth and death are subject to controversy, what can be said about his teachings? Like Jesus, he wrote nothing himself. But unlike Jesus, his teachings were written down, not thirty-five years after his death but 350, and not in the land of his life and teaching, India, but on the island of Sri Lanka. What can possibly be said with any confidence about the Buddha's words and thoughts?

In his new book, the noted Indian essayist and novelist Pankaj Mishra, apparently undeterred by the disjunctions of time and space, tells us. Mishra began work more than a decade ago on a historical novel about the Buddha while living in the quiet little town of Mashobra, near the former British hill station of Simla, in the foothills of the Himalayas in India. But the project stalled:

> I couldn't have known then that it would be impossible to understand the Buddha or his teachings from books alone, and that I would have to leave Mashobra and enter the larger world, travel to places as different as America and Kashmir, England and Afghanistan, learn to see differently the western writers and intellectuals I idolized, before I could begin to understand the Buddha, his teachings, and their special relevance in these troubled, bewildering times from which his own age seemed, superficially at least, so remote.

Mishra's hope was that writing the novel would help him fill gaps in his knowledge of his country's past "and give me the historical sense I felt I lacked." He seems to have abandoned the historical novel because his interest turned from the Buddha in the past to the Buddha in the present.

It was only in the spring of 2001, after returning to London from a trip to Pakistan and Afghanistan to report on the Taliban, that he decided to return to the Buddha, but in a work of nonfiction rather than a novel. Mishra had visited Peshawar, once a cosmopolitan Buddhist city, where shaven-headed teachers of a sublime philosophy of mind had been replaced by bearded preachers of jihad, condemning the infidels of their imagination.

The book that he has written is not simply a life of the Buddha. An idiosyncratic, sprawling work of some 400 pages, *An End to Suffering* moves back and forth between biography, tales of eccentric nineteenth-century European travelers to India, a memoir of Mishra's philosophical education and philosophical manifesto. The life of the Buddha that he recounts retains, however, some of the characteristics of the novel he had planned. Mishra often writes as if he knows his subject's most intimate thoughts, telling us, for example, that the younger Buddha "dreamed of travel to what to him then seemed impossibly distant places," and that the older Buddha "was understandably anxious about admitting women into a celibate order of men."

Yet the Buddha's age is remote from ours, and we cannot divine his thoughts. Indeed, according to Buddhist doctrine, the Buddha had no dreams and was never anxious. Thus, in important ways, the Buddha who lived in India some 2,500 years ago must remain inaccessible. Mishra's Buddha, the Buddha he portrays as the savior of modernity, is a creation of modernity.

The Buddha was but one of many gurus on the north Indian scene in the sixth (or fifth) century BCE. Almost all the rest disappeared into the mists of time, but the Buddha remained, whether because of the wisdom of his teachings or the patronage he received from kings and merchants, or some combination of the two. The community of monks that he established flourished in India for almost two millennia before disappearing for a variety of reasons, the most visible of which was the destruction of monasteries by invading Muslim armies.

Buddhism had been dead in India for almost 500 years when its remnants—monuments, stone inscriptions, statues and texts—were encountered by officials of the British East India Company and various European adventurers in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. From these remnants, European Orientalists (in the good sense of the term) imagined the Buddha, without necessarily ever encountering a Buddhist or, in the case of many of the great Sanskrit philologists, ever setting foot in India. This Buddha, born of a latter-day Enlightenment, bore all the marks of the Age of Reason: He taught a simple philosophy, free of dogma; he was an empiricist and an egalitarian, making his teachings available to all social classes. His was a rational religion without a god, if it was a religion at all. And like the anti-Papist scholars who first translated Buddhist texts, he was opposed to all ritual and priestcraft. It is this Buddha that Mishra discovers, not in an Asian language but in English (the language in which Gandhi first read the Bhagavad-Gita). Mishra admits that "perhaps I wouldn't have got too far with my interest in the Buddha had I not known about his renewal by the West in the nineteenth century, or how many of the European and American writers I admired had praised him."

Donald S. Lopez Jr. is Carl W. Belser Professor of Buddhist and Tibetan Studies at the University of Michigan. He is the author of, among other works, Prisoners of Shangri-La: Tibetan Buddhism and the West *(Chicago).*

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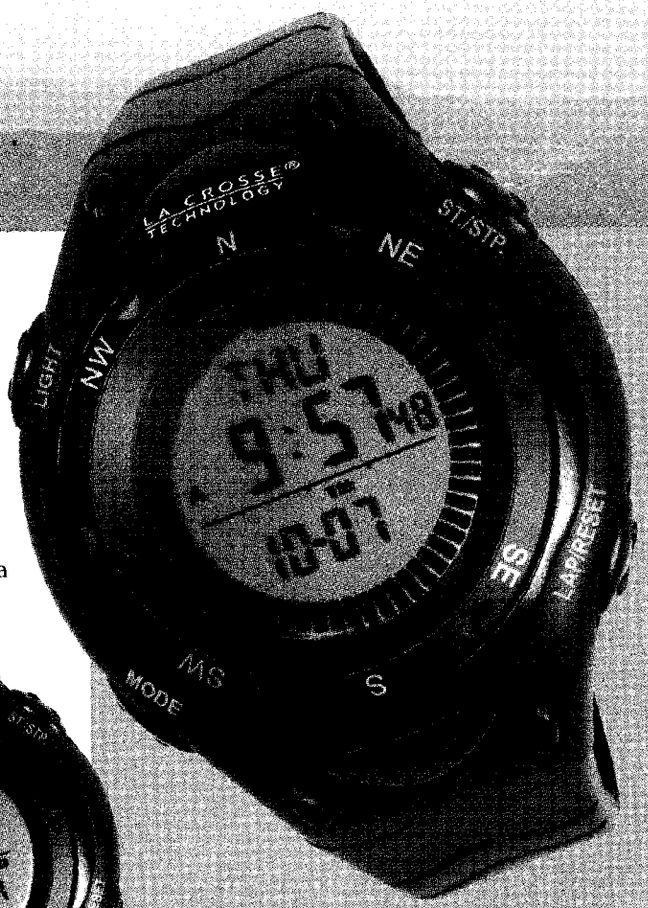

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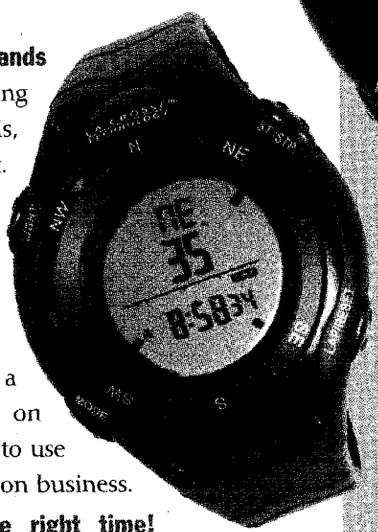

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Indeed, his book is the product of a dizzying process of cross-cultural exchange. The Buddha, an itinerant teacher of northern India during the Iron Age, founded an order of monks and nuns that spread south to Sri Lanka and eventually throughout East and Southeast Asia. The European explorers, philologists and colonial officials who discovered the ruins of Buddhism created a view of the Buddha and of Buddhism (a term with no correlate in a Buddhist language and that, according to the *OED*, first appeared in English in 1801) that existed nowhere in the Buddhist world. This view of the Buddha came to be adopted by Buddhist elites across Asia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, who used it both to combat the efforts of Christian missionaries (as in Sri Lanka) and to defend their faith against attacks by the modern nation-state (as in Japan). Mishra finds this Edwardian Buddha in his reading, certified by his favorite European writers. And he finds the teachings of this Buddha being practiced not in India but in Marin County. It is this Buddha that Mishra prescribes to an international Anglophone world as the appropriate remedy to the woes of our world, an end to suffering:

> He had not only diagnosed the new intellectual and spiritual impasse faced by human beings at a time of tumultuous change: he had also tried to overcome it. In the process, he undermined many assumptions that lie behind the political and economic arrangements of the modern era.

Mishra's is a Buddha that most of the millions who have been called Buddhists over the millennia would not immediately recognize. He is a demythologized Buddha, who does not speak of rebirth or nirvana; whose goal is not the annihilation of the cycle of birth and death but the creation of understanding and harmony within it. For Mishra, the Buddha's most important teaching was that there is no self, and he returns to it again and again, in often eloquent exposition: "The world [in the sense of all common individuals in the world], whose nature is to become other, is committed to becoming, has exposed itself to becoming; it relishes only becoming, yet what it relishes brings fear, and what it fears is pain."

In the course of his wide reading in European philosophy, Mishra discovered striking resemblances between various teachings of the Buddha and Western writers, from Socrates and Pythagoras to Hume and Hegel to Dostoyevsky and Nietzsche. Thus, after citing a passage from Montaigne, he observes that a "similar view of changeable man prompted the Buddha" to describe the process of consciousness. The Buddha's "austere vision," he suggests in one of many jarring comparisons, "is not far from the one found among the greatest of modern novelists, Flaubert and Proust." Mishra does not mention Kant, who cautioned against drawing too much meaning from apparent similarities, noting that "since human reason has been enraptured by innumerable objects in various ways for many centuries, it cannot easily fail that for everything new, something old can be found which has some kind of similarity to it."

Mishra's Buddha would be unrecognizable to most of the millions of people who have been called Buddhists over the millennia.

But comparison is how we try to make sense of the unfamiliar, and the Buddha has been made modern by comparing him to this or that Western thinker for more than a century. Mishra does not claim any historical link between the ancient teachings of the Buddha and the insights of the modern novelist. Rather, he suggests that they sound alike because they are true, and that the Buddha saw long ago what European thinkers (with the exception of certain ancient Greeks) have only belatedly come to understand.

Mishra's European hero is Nietzsche. He is a curious choice since, although the German philosopher praised Buddhism over Christianity, he also saw it as a "nihilistic turning away from life." While acknowledging this skepticism, Mishra nonetheless portrays the Buddha as the true *Übermensch*, "who had liberated himself from the 'morality of custom' and acquired 'a power over oneself and over fate,' which has 'penetrated to the profoundest depths and become instinct.'" One of the most famous passages in the Buddhist canon, from a text regarded by scholars as early, states, "Abstain from all unwholesome deeds, perform wholesome ones, purify your mind: this is the teaching of the buddhas." But the devil can cite Scripture for his purpose; it is admittedly tiresome to select this statement from among the thousands attributed to the Buddha as proof that his teachings were not "beyond good and evil." The more interesting question is the role that Nietzsche and other European thinkers play in Mishra's attempt to catapult the Buddha into modernity.

The Buddha surpasses all European philosophers, in Mishra's view, not only because he anticipated them by two millennia but because he "had not been content with vivid description or eloquent lament"; they only identified the symptoms, while he prescribed the cure. That cure, Mishra argues, is nothing short of the transformation of the mind. The Buddha "offered a moral and spiritual regimen that led to nothing less than a whole new way of looking at and experiencing the world." Mishra does not mention that nirvana, the state of ultimate transformation, entailed the annihilation of the mind.

Everything that Mishra says about the Buddha has been said many times before, although he often says it with particular grace. But perhaps this should not be taken as a defect. In Buddhist philosophy, there is no greater sin than innovation, because there is nothing that is true that the Buddha did not already say, or at least mean. As one text says, "All that is well spoken is spoken by the Buddha." And the Buddha himself is famously reported to have said that what he understood, the content of his enlightenment, was nothing new; he was only discovering what previous buddhas had understood in the past, and what future buddhas would understand in the ages to come. Whether buddhas come or go, the nature of reality remains the same.

The Buddha was also famous for his extraordinary pedagogical skills, for teaching what was appropriate for the moment, using his telepathic ability to discern the needs and capabilities of each member of his audience. And so Mishra's Buddha is a Buddha for our time. He is a liberal democrat, concerned with the power that large states lord over the small, committed to a participatory process of decision-making, indeed, calling into question all forms of autonomy and individuality, "the hypothesis which lies even now, in an age where mass manipulation is a respectable industry, at the basis of modern civilization." Even amid all the constraints imposed by mass culture, Mishra claims, it is still possible to liberate oneself from false consciousness, to gain self-realization (that there is no self) and to "share with others the conditioned nature and interdependence of things, and the need for an ethical life." Freedom, but without God; moral values, but without Jesus, or Mohammed. Mishra's hero is a Buddha for the blue states, but one sadly shorn of his miraculous powers to chasten confident kings. ■

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In Cold Blood

DAPHNE EVIATAR

IMPERIAL RECKONING: The Untold Story of Britain's Gulag in Kenya.
By Caroline Elkins. Holt. 475 pp. $27.50.

HISTORIES OF THE HANGED: The Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire.
By David Anderson. Norton. 406 pp. $25.95.

In the 1950s in Kenya, British settlers lived in terror of an "evil" that was sweeping the country, threatening to wipe out their aristocratic enclave: Mau Mau. In reports to the Home Office, colonial authorities described a satanic primitive religion that was turning previously content and compliant servants and laborers into bloodthirsty butchers wreaking havoc across the land.

But for Africans, Mau Mau was the sound of liberation. Although there's no expert consensus on its origins, a Ugandan writer I know who spent twelve years in Kenya tells me that in Kiswahili, Mau Mau is recognized as an acronym: it means "British go back to Europe; African gets Freedom." As a child, he and his friends would whisper it at baffled white visitors.

Whatever its origins, Mau Mau was a cry of political rebellion. And it was the inevitable outgrowth of a half-century of repressive rule by the British in Kenya. By the 1950s, the British "civilizing" mission had ejected Kenyans from their land, destroyed their communities and transformed them into squatters, tenant farmers or low-wage laborers. It's hardly surprising that some of those Africans had grown restive, and that most thought it was time for the British to go home. But for the British, the sinister pall cast over Mau Mau served an important purpose: It justified the hidden torture and brutality they used to retain their grip on power long after the myth of benevolent empire could possibly be sustained.

Two new books—Caroline Elkins's *Imperial Reckoning: The Untold Story of Britain's Gulag in Kenya* and David Anderson's *Histories of the Hanged: The Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire*—cast the notorious Mau Mau uprising and the British response in a new light, revealing the astonishing lengths to which the British went to forestall the inevitable demise of their imperial enterprise.

Most Mau Mau leaders were drawn from the ranks of the Kikuyu, one of Kenya's leading tribes. The Kikuyu had long been the country's most prosperous farmers, until the British arrived in the late nineteenth century and white settlers began to appropriate their most fertile lands. Over time, the Kikuyu were forced onto tiny "reserves" that couldn't possibly sustain them. The lucky ones were allowed to squat on settlers' farms but were forbidden from growing the most profitable crops or owning more than a paltry amount of cattle. Mechanization and a rapidly intensifying land grab soon drove many off even these meager plots.

Recognizing that the deteriorating situation could explode, the British named Kikuyu "chiefs" to lord over their neighbors, handing them power, money and arable land in return for their loyalty. Chiefs enforced the colonial government's strict tax laws and rules requiring all Kikuyu to carry identification and employment cards. So as African nationalism fostered calls for decolonization across Africa in the 1950s, it's no wonder that in Kenya, where Africans were denied even the vote, those with the least land, education and prospects decided to take matters into their own hands. Reviving an old Kikuyu solidarity oath, they added a commitment to band together to eject the British and win their freedom.

The picture the British have painted of Mau Mau is one of striking brutality, of men who, via magical oath-taking ceremonies, were transformed into monsters who hacked their victims to pieces and displayed the remains for all to see. No doubt, many of the murders were gruesome and spread understandable alarm among Kenya's white elite. But the image of Mau Mau has also overshadowed its reality: During the eight-year war, Mau Mau warriors killed only thirty-two European civilians and fewer than 200 British soldiers and police. Mau Mau violence was far more lethal to the Kikuyu who refused to join the cause: Mau Mau assassinated close to 2,000 Kikuyu

Daphne Eviatar has written on Africa for the New York Times Magazine *and the* Boston Globe, *among other publications. She last wrote for* The Nation *on Angola.*

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civilians. Far from representing all Kikuyu, the movement began as a militant fringe, its terror tactics against its fellow tribesmen a response to the hierarchies the British themselves had created. But it is the British response to Mau Mau, which likely left more than 20,000 Africans dead (there is still no accurate count), that will most shock readers familiar with the official story.

This is the focus of Elkins's *Imperial Reckoning*, which provides a painfully thorough catalogue of previously unknown atrocities by the British. Elkins, an assistant professor of history at Harvard, says she began her project expecting to tell a British success story. But after a decade combing through British archives and interviewing some 300 survivors of the war, she discovered that what had long been depicted as a laudable withdrawal and "rehabilitation" by the British was actually a cover-up of unimaginable proportions.

In 1952, a week after one of Mau Mau's more notorious strikes—the murder of a prominent chief by attackers dressed as policemen—the British declared a state of emergency and rounded up prominent Kikuyu leaders, including Jomo Kenyatta, who would later become Kenya's first president. Although Kenyatta was a widely respected leader of a moderate Kikuyu-led political party, the British deemed all Kikuyu suspect and so assumed Kenyatta was leading the Mau Mau revolt. His subsequent show trial and seven years' imprisonment removed a prominent voice of progressive reform and created a rallying symbol for the radicals' cause.

This was indicative of the course of the war. Instead of understanding Mau Mau as a radical movement among a population with legitimate political grievances, alarmed white settlers viewed each Mau Mau attack as a sign that an inhuman viciousness had seized the entire Kikuyu population. Their smiling servants had inexplicably become violent savages.

As the hysteria mounted after each attack, the British imposed harsher and harsher emergency measures. Thousands of suspected Kikuyu were rounded up, interrogated, beaten and humiliated, detained without charge, denied access to the evidence against them, convicted merely for suspected association with Mau Mau, and—since the British never declared the conflict a real war—denied the rights of prisoners of war under the Geneva Conventions. Reports of abuse and human rights violations from the International Committee of the Red Cross were ignored, as were complaints from representatives of the opposition party in London.

It all sounds eerily familiar: The British colonial government believed it was under siege from "evil"—an incomprehensible force beyond its control. There were meager attempts to win the "hearts and minds" of the Kikuyu behind barbed wire. The renowned archeologist and ethnographer Louis Leakey insisted Mau Mau must "confess" their oath and take a counter-oath to cure them of its powers. But any real attempts at "rehabilitation" of Mau Mau were quickly overwhelmed by the deprivation and brutality employed to extract confessions.

Not surprisingly, the British actions only drove more into the Mau Mau fold. Under the banner of a state of emergency, the colonial administration imprisoned innocents and punished entire villages when terrified residents refused to testify against their neighbors. Fearful settlers fired their Kikuyu laborers and ejected squatting farmers. And the administration closed Kikuyu schools, leaving more newly idle and angry Kikuyu with nothing to do but join the rebels.

Although tens of thousands were imprisoned without trial, some suspected Mau Mau were arrested, charged and tried for their alleged crimes. But as David Anderson, a lecturer in African studies at Oxford University, reveals in a vivid and comprehensive new account of the war, *Histories of the Hanged*, the trials testify as much to the brutality of the British counteroffensive as to the Mau Mau crimes themselves. Anderson, whose book is based largely on the documentation of 800 capital cases of accused Mau Mau that survive in the British archives, acknowledges the huge challenge the British faced trying to uphold justice when terrified witnesses recanted their testimony and the courts were overwhelmed with the volume of cases. But he also finds strong evidence of severe brutality by police against prisoners in 80 percent of those cases. The pressure to convict led to a complete abandonment of the most basic British principles of justice. More than a thousand men were sent to the gallows as convicted Mau Mau terrorists, many on the flimsiest of evidence. "In no other place, and at no other time in the history of British imperialism," writes Anderson, "was state execution used on such a scale as this."

What happened at the settlement at Lari was emblematic. One night in March 1953, the British-trained African vigilante force known as the Home Guard came upon the mutilated remains of a Kikuyu loyalist nailed to a tree. Then, they noticed

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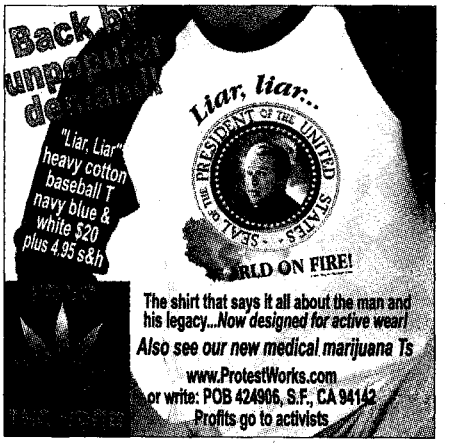
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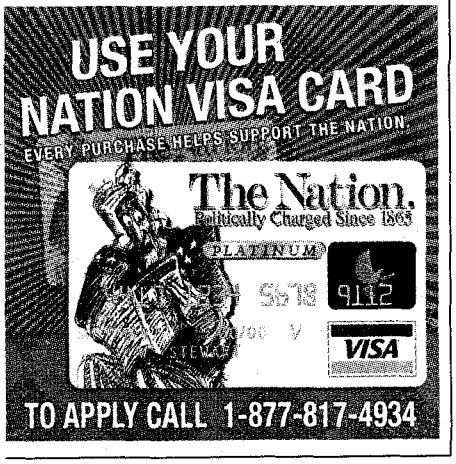

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fires breaking out in the direction of their own homes back in town. They raced back to find 120 of the leading male elders, their wives and their children either dead or seriously wounded in the ruins of fifteen homesteads. It was the largest-scale attack by Mau Mau to date.

The response was not mourning but vengeance. That night, with the apparent complicity of European commanders, the Home Guard murdered some 200 suspected Mau Mau in an orgy of beatings and summary shootings, the mangled bodies left in the bush to be picked over by stray dogs for days afterward.

Eventually, more than 300 men gave confessions to the Mau Mau killings at Lari. But as Anderson documents, it's impossible to know what sort of coercion might have extracted them. Recognizing that their statements would be suspect, police encouraged traumatized survivors to corroborate their testimony. Anderson finds that unreliable testimony provided the basis for eighteen hangings. Still, in the end, after appeals through the British legal system, acquittals in the Lari cases outnumbered convictions, and outraged settlers pressed for and won even harsher measures and more summary justice. The story of the countermassacre and the increasing use of systematic state counterterror, meanwhile, was buried.

With outrage growing, the British stepped up their assault, now taking it to the urban centers. During two weeks in Nairobi in 1954, the government imprisoned more than 20,000 suspected Mau Mau and sent them to screening camps, deporting another 30,000 to Kikuyu reserves. By the end of Operation Anvil, as it was known, nearly half of all Kikuyu in the city had been imprisoned without trial.

But it is the conditions of that imprisonment that reveal the depths to which the British sank to maintain the illusion of their great empire, and which would ultimately prove its undoing. Elkins has bravely done justice to that history. Her book provides a painstaking and painfully detailed look at the British detention system in Kenya, a pipeline of overflowing prison camps where inmates routinely died of infectious disease, starvation and the harshness of forced labor—if they made it through the interrogations. Those "screenings" grew progressively harsher, with guards torturing inmates by using electric shock and fire, shoving broken bottles, snakes and scorpions into their private parts, and employing a range of other sexual and scatological humiliations and brutalities in a systematic effort to physically and psychologically break the Kikuyu population.

Elkins doesn't shy away from the survivors' stories, no matter how gruesome. One chapter opens with a man staggering to his feet with blood oozing from his mouth and nose, lifting his head from a bucket of urine, feces and sand only to see a double image of his torturer looming over him with a club, ready to strike another blow. A settler recalls taking a suspect to the Mau Mau investigation center, then sticking around to help "soften" him up: "By the time I cut his balls off he had no ears, and his eyeball, the right one, I think, was hanging out of its socket. Too bad, he died before we got much out of him." This book is not for the faint-hearted.

By the end of 1954 more than 52,000 Kikuyu were imprisoned in the growing British gulag. But if the camps broke some into cooperating, they drove others further into the anticolonial resistance. The only way Britain could hold on to its empire was through intensifying repression and brutality. "The hypocrisies, the exploitations, the violence, and the suffering were all laid bare in the Pipeline," writes Elkins. "It was there that Britain finally revealed the true nature of its civilizing mission." And though the colonial authorities did their best to conceal the camps' conditions, by the mid-1950s their harshness was well known in London. When these abuses could no longer be denied, Anderson points out, the British government attributed them to poor judgment by a few misguided low-level individuals—another familiar story.

That story unraveled in March 1959, when eleven prisoners mysteriously died while digging ditches outside the Hola prison, home to many "hard core" Mau Mau. The official explanation was that they had accidentally died from drinking contaminated water. It took three separate investigations to reveal the truth to the British public: All eleven had been clubbed to death by African guards under the supervision of European warders. Britain's "civilizing mission" in Kenya was over.

In 1961 Jomo Kenyatta returned home to lead a bitterly divided country. Ever a moderate, he urged Kenyans to forgive and forget the past. "In Kenyatta's Kenya," writes Anderson, "there would be a deafening silence about Mau Mau."

It's impossible to read these harrowing accounts without noting some striking parallels between the British response to Mau Mau and the American response to the threat of terrorism: the torture and humiliation of prisoners at Abu Ghraib; the denial of basic rights to Al Qaeda suspects at Guantánamo Bay; the confusion of insur-

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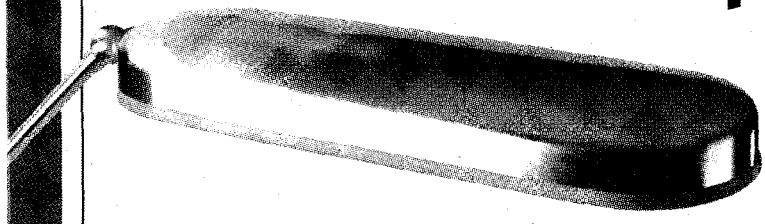

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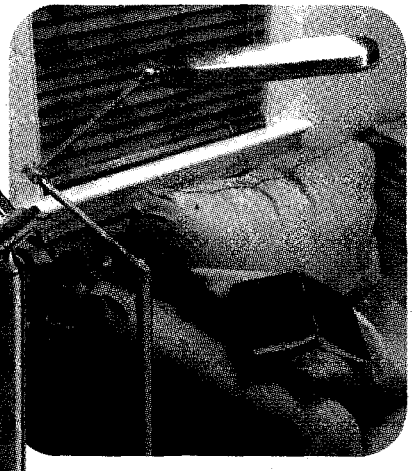

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gency, rebellion and terrorism; and the ongoing assaults on Iraqi civilians in the name of democracy. These two substantial books not only offer an important corrective to the long-distorted story of the end of British empire in Kenya but also serve as a stark reminder of the cynical justifications that fear can foster and that history eventually lays bare.

For the sake of unity, Kenya's leaders (which included many British loyalists) chose to bury the truth about the assault on Mau Mau, the methods used and the people ultimately responsible for the movement's violent suppression. Given history's tendency to repeat itself, one must question the wisdom of such a path—then, and now. ■

FILMS

My Life as a Man

STUART KLAWANS

LOST EMBRACE • NOBODY KNOWS

I've heard Argentines say that Buenos Aires is more densely populated by psychoanalysts than anyplace else in the world. Whether there's truth to this boast (if it is a boast), I don't know; but something must be on the mind of a city that can produce *Lost Embrace*, a film that presents actual footage of a ritual circumcision, then introduces a long-absent father who is missing one arm.

Vanished body parts, vanished parents and lovers, a whole society that vanished in Eastern Europe: These are the ghosts that haunt this ambling comedy of neighborhood life in Buenos Aires. The neighborhood in this case is an indoor mall: little more than a twisting, up-and-down hallway lined with seven or eight glassy storefronts. Given the modesty of this setting, the shopkeepers' main business consists of looking in on one another. They visit, gossip, spy and tease; and while they are so engaged, the main character snoops and kibitzes with us.

He is Ariel (Daniel Hendler), a shaggily handsome young fellow with a rolling gait and an almost psychoanalytic urge toward self-explanation. He opens the film by giving a voiceover tour of the mall, as a handheld camera follows the back of his head down the hallway, past the storefronts, to his mother's lingerie shop. As he will soon relate, he was the baby in that circumcision footage—an infant whose father deserted right after the ceremony, in 1973, and has lived in Israel ever since, to Ariel's infinite resentment.

As *Lost Embrace* begins, Ariel is planning his own disappearance from Buenos Aires. He hopes to settle in Europe, which he figures he can do as a Polish citizen, thanks to some documents preserved by his grandmother, a Holocaust survivor. That Ariel maybe hasn't thought through this scheme becomes plain during his double-talk interview with a Polish consul, who looks at the creased, fragile papers and asks if the young man is perhaps of Israelite descent. "No, no, not all Jews are Israelis, most are just Jews," Ariel sputters, with alarm in his eyes at being found out. Then he names, in excruciatingly correctible form, the many admirable Poles who have moved him to reclaim his heritage: Lech Walesa, Frederic Chopin and, um, of course *him*—as the camera locates the office's portrait of John Paul II.

A dismal effort—but with a callousness that fits him as awkwardly as his strutting sailor's walk, Ariel is willing to dismiss a whole country's worth of Jewish ghosts, if by doing so he can get out of Buenos Aires. To him, this is enough of a place of mourning: for the girlfriend he dumped, the college he dropped out of, the father he never knew and the brave, birdlike little mother (Adriana Aizenberg) who on a daily basis kills Ariel with her lack of complaints.

Written, directed and produced by Daniel Burman, *Lost Embrace* is the opposite of a comedy of ignorance. It gets its laughs from Ariel's inability to remain clueless. Does Rita, the erotic distraction next door, have a lover besides Ariel, one who is more important because he bankrolls her shop? Ariel can neither hold back from asking her nor admit that he hears the answer. Is his mother really a full-time martyr, or does she get more out of her folk-dance evenings than folk dancing? When evidence

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of not-so-secret fun walks in the door, Ariel brusquely tries to shove it—him—right back out. In a culture of psychoanalysis, such determined, failing efforts to overlook the obvious may be tagged as neurosis. In film comedy, they're opportunities: occasions when a clever actor like Hendler can get the audience to laugh (but not look down) at him.

The film's other main source of fun, of course, is the community in which Ariel lives. These characters start out as an ensemble—voluble and strong-featured, but clumped in the background—and then become, through episodes of excitability, a set of individuals, each with a distinct presence. In other words, Ariel comes to admit that he knows these people and likes them. Fortunately, this process goes forward without ever being named. Burman just lets it happen, loosely and casually, in the same unassuming fashion with which he slaps frames around his shots.

The effect might even be a little too relaxed. When a filmmaker concentrates so lovingly on a man's desires, while women serve mostly as illustrations; when the little society that the film creates seems cantankerous but without any hint of real danger; when the multitudinous closeups, so convenient for home video, threaten to become monotonous, and the solution is to break up the sameness with cute chapter titles, then I begin to wish for just a bit more ambition. Burman, though, feels so easy with convention that he ultimately turns *Lost Embrace* into a running-man comedy, with Ariel periodically dashing along the sidewalk for no clear reason other than that Woody Allen once did it.

You see, I'm trying not to oversell. Maybe that's a neurotic trait on my part: the anxious need to hold back an endorsement, even though I enjoyed *Lost Embrace* and suspect you might, too. It passes the time, and more, during a sparse month for movies. It has the merit of possessing more brains than it lets on to. And at certain high points—the revelation of the mother's joy at folk dancing, or the sudden opening up of the grandmother, at the end, into full-voiced Yiddish song—*Lost Embrace* momentarily forgets its protagonist, or lets him forget himself, to revel in the women Burman loves.

In two early masterworks, *Maborosi* and *After Life*, Hirokazu Kore-eda showed us characters who pass as strangers, untouched and ghostlike, along the vital stream of everyday life. In *After Life*, in fact, the character really was a ghost: a sad young woman, dead for several years, who strolled by herself through a nighttime crowd.

Kore-eda's new film, *Nobody Knows*, once again shows us the mundane bustle as seen by someone who's shut out of it, and for whom ordinary things are therefore achingly vivid. This time, though, Kore-eda has gone back to his roots in documentary film, to make a fiction based on a real event.

In 1988 a story broke in the Japanese press about four children who had been discovered living on their own, in increasingly desperate circumstances, after being deserted by their mother. Although their plight dragged on for months, the neighbors in their apartment building somehow remained oblivious to the very existence of three of the kids, until the youngest girl died and the authorities stepped in.

This grim set of facts has now inspired Kore-eda to make a moving, meditative, sometimes painful but decidedly not grim drama set in present-day Tokyo, about 12-year-old Akira (Yagira Yuya) and his three younger siblings. When first seen, the littlest of the kids are in fact laughing goofily, despite having just been sneaked into their new apartment building in suitcases. Their mother (played by a Japanese television star known as YOU), who may generously be described as free-spirited, understands that the landlord and other tenants don't want to see or hear a lot of children running around, and her budget seems to rule out a lease in a more tolerant building; so she takes the extreme measure of concealing the kids. They treat it as a game at first; they enjoy putting one over on the neighbors. But the smallest children will not be allowed to leave the apartment at all. The older girl, 10-year-old Kyoko (Kitaura Ayu), is permitted to venture as far as the apartment's tiny balcony, because she's in charge of the laundry and that's where the washing machine is installed. Only Akira has the right to wander the streets, so he can shop for groceries and do other errands. These chores multiply when mom airily runs off, leaving behind only a small stack of thousand-yen bills and a note saying she'll be away for a while.

From this point on, *Nobody Knows* becomes the story of Akira's struggle to meet impossible responsibilities. A naturally studious boy (though denied a chance to go to school), he is too smart to keep his burden a secret; but since none of the adults he approaches is willing to intervene, and since he's afraid the authorities would separate him from his siblings, he carries on as best he can for as long as he can. It's amazing to see how well he does. It's profoundly touching, and strangely cheering as well, to see the pleasure he and his self-imprisoned sib-

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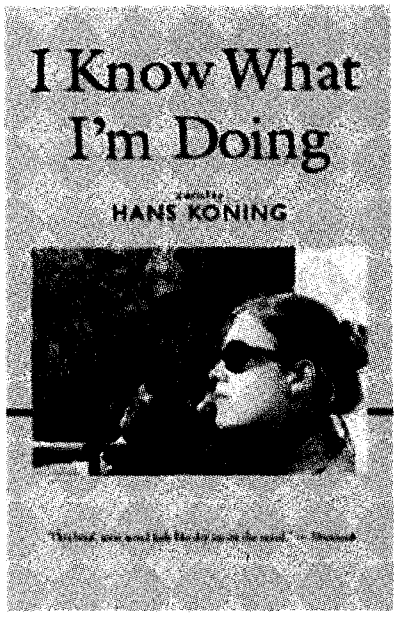

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lings take in one another and in their few favorite things: a toy piano, a stuffed bunny rabbit, bowls of instant ramen, slippers that squeak when you walk.

With his keen interest in weather and the changing light, Kore-eda dwells not only on the kids' deteriorating lives but on their course through the seasons. (He shot *Nobody Knows* in sequence over a full year, from autumn through summer, during which time Yagira Yuya's voice changed.) And with his extraordinary eye for composition, Kore-eda makes the film not only a moral study of Akira but also a visual marvel. Strong, graphic lines—the poles and wires of a streetscape, the curve of a river embankment, the risers of a tall stair—jut and crisscross and meander through the frame, taking your eyes on intricate journeys while pulling together the deep, contrasting layers of activity and unoccupied space. The images combine the tension and repose of great chamber music; and thanks to Kore-eda's astonishing talent, they just keep pouring out.

And pouring. Although *Nobody Knows* takes the passage of time as one of its themes, it maybe could have conveyed the experience without requiring a full 141 minutes of your life. The results do diminish, past a certain point; and when you're given such an opportunity for leisurely contemplation, you may devote a moment or two to asking inconvenient questions about improbabilities in the story. Not that there's much plot; but of the few details that Kore-eda has stretched over the long frame of his movie, a significant number do not hold up to inspection.

I'm sorry to say that *Nobody Knows*, for all its power, is probably not one of Kore-eda's major works. If he had not made *Maborosi* and *After Life*——

But he did. Whatever the attenuations and shortcomings of *Nobody Knows*, it has to be seen by anyone with more than a casual interest in film.

Screening Schedule: One of the great things about having the Museum of Modern Art back at full strength is the return of its annual "Documentary Fortnight" series. On view February 10–28, this year's roster of recent nonfiction works looks unusually rich, especially in films from South America and the Middle East. To cite just two pictures among many, I'm looking forward to Patricio Guzmán's feature-length *Salvador Allende* and Mahnaz Afzali's *The Ladies' Room*, a *cinéma vérité* piece shot inside a women's washroom in Tehran. For information: www.moma.org. ■

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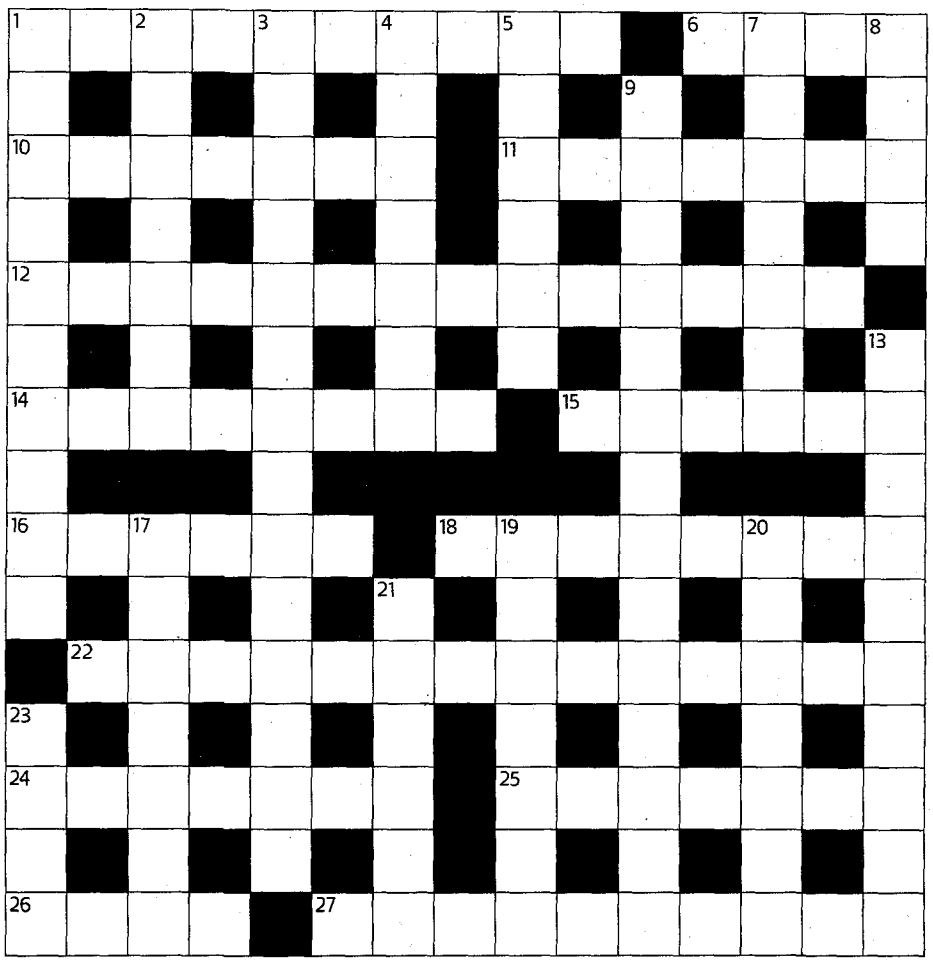
PUZZLE NO. 2975

FRANK W. LEWIS



ACROSS

1 Chief Justice and Mayor of Washington. Bush hanger-on, too. (10)

6 What you have in hand to foist off on someone? (4)

10 Gives support, but one does it in the reverse position. (5,2)

11 The "gen," as some say, is a derogatory description. (It's what cattle do with what you get from a thistle.) (7)

12 You might if you stretch a point, but prevaricators don't need a sieve to do it. (6,3,5)

14 No gas? Yes! But even if it's wrong, you can consider such shouldn't smell bad. (8)

15 Such a parent wouldn't spare the rod on the behind, so described! (6)

16 Fodder to get cut down, and then to be stored here? (6)

18 Just say no! (I would return with a sickly mien!) (8)

22 A person doesn't need to be shown the door, and one goes to some personal trouble if one does. (4,7,3)

24 It's material and should be found in any licentious activity! (7)

25 Not Franklin's new type, being much more rare as an unfair business transaction. (3,4)

26 Drat! With a onetime good sock, it's just what might be called for! (4)

27 At a certain junction, a mistake sits badly with the purveyors of fear! (10)

DOWN

1 and **23** Those like Ruth, perhaps, might be found in the trees, being so naïve. (5,2,3,4)

2 Agreements to show other than direct current wiring? (7)

3 Relatively bussing types? (7,7)

4 Bring me up on the way to your beginnings, to show vicarious expressions of feelings. (7)

5 People in need may have gone on it, but I feel bad after seeing what starts 25. (6)

7 Typically Paul is in position to get a drink around it. (7)

8 Tend to obey this? It might make you think! (4)

9 There's always a point to one's intake, but it doesn't quite start with the right words, and the bird flies over the queen. (5,9)

13 Such people try to impress with their total comprehension. (A wonk rises above one large point!) (4-2-4)

17 The name for a gang of thieves shows we're all not getting any! (7)

19 One who guarantees not to get out with more certain finality. (7)

20 They may be over-occupied by adherence to the rifle, but behold the unusual store they end up with! (7)

21 It involves pepsin and produces changes in organic substance. (6)

23 See 1 down

PUZZLED? No more cross words. If you don't see why "Lures" are "Ground Rules" send for those of Mr. Lewis to: Puzzled, The Nation, 33 Irving Place, New York, NY 10003, or access our website at www.thenation.com/about/crossword.mhtml.

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 2974

		S	W	I	S	S	C	H	E	E	S	E		
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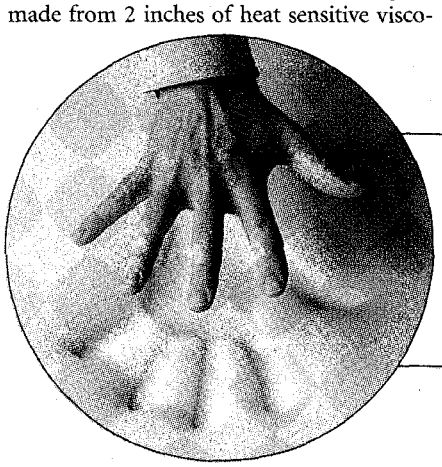

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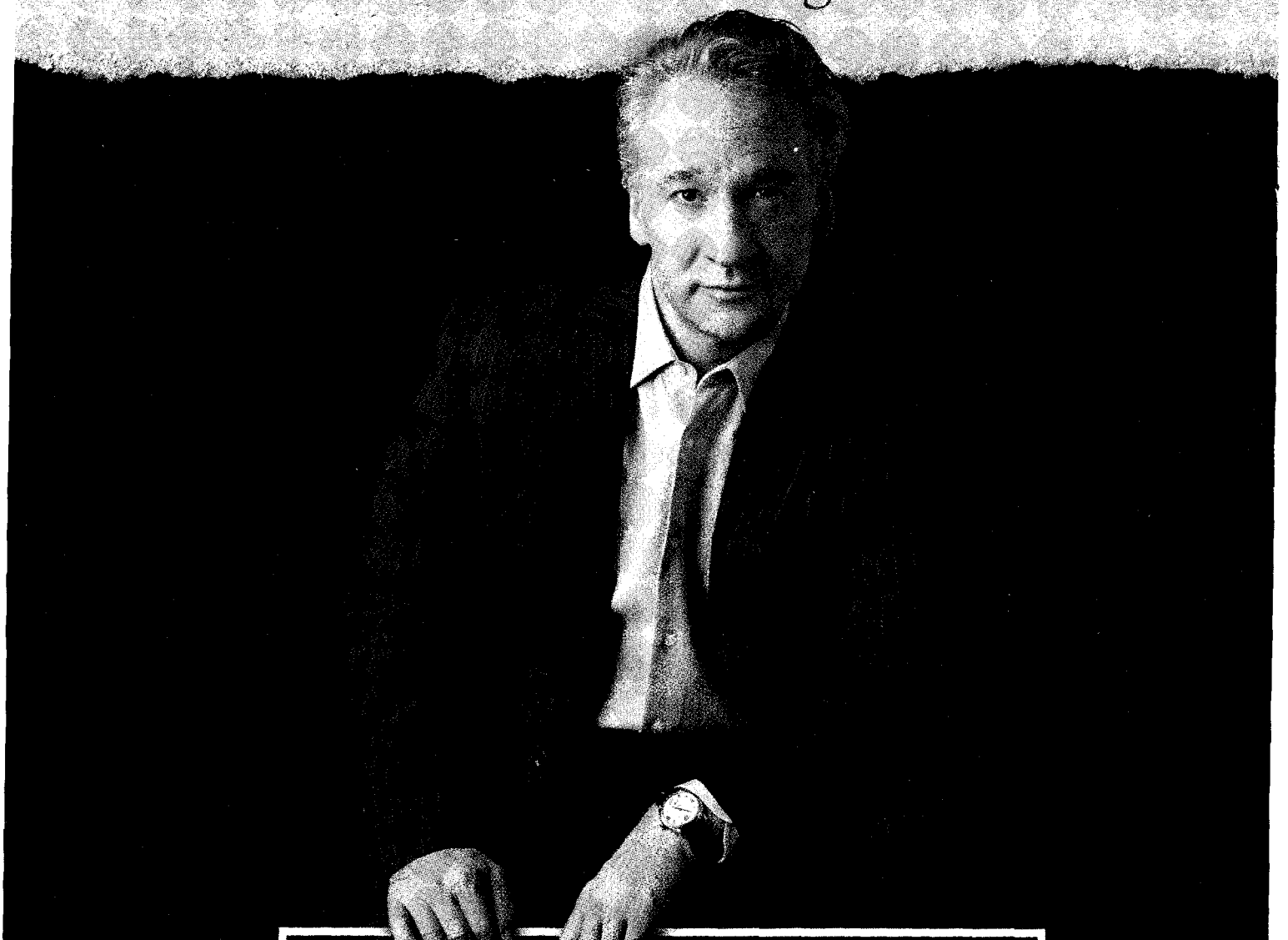
2. 'Tics' means blood-sucking insects.



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